DIRECT ACTION AND INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM.
THE SINDICATO GENERAL OBRERO DE LA INDUSTRIA FABRIL:
A STUDY OF AN ANARCHO-SYNDICALIST UNION IN URBAN CUBA, 1917-1925.

REBECCA CONDRON BA(Hons)

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Signature.....R Condron.....

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Contents:

Abstract

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, leftist thought in Cuba favoured anarcho-syndicalism more than any other ideology. Moreover, its practicality made it a popular choice among workers, who, attracted by the prospect of immediate and obtainable benefits, such as higher pay and fewer working hours, could help to prepare for the more distant revolution. This blend appealed to factory workers in Havana, in particular, and it is on that group that this thesis concentrates.

A substantial growth in manufacturing industry in Cuba's capital during the 1910s facilitated in the creation, and then in the expansion, of a union to support the growing factory workforce. This thesis traces the lifespan of the Sindicato General Obrero de la Industria Fabril (*Manufacturing Union Workers' General Union* – SGOIF) and of its periodical *El Progreso* (*Progress).* Precursors to the SGOIF are studied and, for the first time, the union and its mouthpiece are analysed in detail. To achieve an in-depth knowledge of the SGOIF, it has been necessary to explore the structure of the union, who belonged to it, what tactics it used and what its ideology was. In this respect, both the philosophy behind the SGOIF and how this was employed in the real world have been examined.

In order to fill the void left by Cuban social historiography, periodicals and government records are among the primary sources that have been inspected, an undertaking that has provided a wealth of information about the need for industrial unionism in Cuba and the perceived importance of direct action tactics among workers during the 1910s and 1920s. Through such examination, it has become clear that workers of the period possessed class-consciousness prior to the foundation of a communist party in Cuba. This thesis shows why anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba collapsed (detailing the part that the SGOIF played in its downfall), paving the way for communism, an ideology still so important in the political and social fabric of Cuba in the twenty first century.

Dedicated to:

The women of my class

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Introduction

Literature Review

Although the history of the Cuban labour movement has been well documented by Cuban and non-Cuban historians alike and the role of anarchism in that movement has been the subject of various studies, the part that anarcho-syndicalism played during the 1910s and the 1920s has mostly been glossed over, some writers barely dignifying it with one or two sentences in an otherwise comprehensive historiography of the Cuban working class. The wealth of available information surrounding both union organisation and the everyday lives of many workers employed in manufacturing industry in Havana, in particular, has been largely ignored, historians preferring instead to focus on the larger industries of sugar and tobacco or else to disregard the appeal of anarchist-related ideas and to concentrate, instead, on the growth of communism in a country that still educates its youth on the relevance of Marxism-Leninism, both of the ideology's past and its (more uncertain) present.

Cuban labour historiography hardly admits the importance of that one-time leftist rival to communism, anarcho-syndicalism. The revolutionary socialist government of present-day Cuba seemingly attempts to validate the system still in place there, so, the bulk of the historiography emanating from Cuba during the last five decades has afforded little attention to anything that does not have a direct link with the nationalist attitudes prevalent today and, as regards the period studied in this thesis (1917-1925), major events such as the October Revolution in Russia, the birth of the Cuban Communist Party in 1925 (PCC), North American imperialism and the rise of the first regional (1920) and national (1925) labour federations have taken scholarly precedence over an ideology that had never agreed with communist means.

Anarchism entered Cuban worker consciousness during the 1880s. Spanish immigrant workers and the circulation of European anarchist periodicals communicated to Cubans an avenue for class struggle that, it was hoped, would combat inequalities present on the island. Prior to this, reformism had been the tool by which skilled tobacco workers, the first group to organise on any level in Cuba, aimed to improve conditions through mediation and education. Reformist leaders had negotiated with factory owners on behalf of the employees; the demands of the latter often being compromised. Anarchism, on the other hand, rejected bourgeois politics, and anarchists refused to use tactics that surrendered to employer concessions, while its promised cocktail of instant material benefits for workers and the image of complete future emancipation meant that anarchist unions attracted some new members.

Anarchism's negative response to bourgeois politics may well account for its initial rise in popularity in a Spanish colony where residents without wealth and/or literacy skills had been excluded from the political arena. During the late nineteenth century, between 1.28% and 3% of all Cubans were eligible to vote. Anarchism promised social revolution for and by the workers themselves and Proudhonist logic assured them of the counter-revolutionary futility of any government.[1] Even in the event of independence and the comparative leniency of new suffrage laws, anarchist-related doctrine continued to gain force in Cuba, resisting such competing leftist ideologies as socialism.

Thwarted attempts to form socialist parties in early twentieth century Cuba have been seen by modern Cuban historians to be the result of the lack of political sophistication

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[1] Joll summarises Proudhonism as follow: "The abolition of the financier and the rentier, the securing to the worker of the full value of the goods he produced, the development of small, mutually supporting groups in place of the dehumanised factories, the constant reminder of the virtues of the peasant's life, all these had an obvious and positive appeal. And Proudhon's negative message was even more telling and contains the essence of anarchism" [Joll, 1979: 61].

among the populace [Aguirre, 1965; Ibarra, 1992; Grobart, 1966]. This thesis asserts that political immaturity and anarchism are not inter-related and that the organisational efforts of Cuban anarchists should not merely be seen as the forerunner to the inevitable success of communism. The failure of socialism to secure any plausible base of support during the first two decades of the last century should be attributed not to miseducation but to the refusal by Cuban socialist organisations to back the majority of strikes during this period. However, while such support could have improved the credibility of socialism, worker emancipation through the ballot box was not considered a serious option by many of the workforce: gross political corruption and the neo-colonialist policies of the United States of America towards Cuba deterred potential voters from wishing to cast any vote, regardless of party rhetoric.

Although popular support was limited, Cuban socialist parties of the early twentieth century have been well documented [Rivero Muñiz, 1962; Ibarra, 1992]. Likewise, the few strikes that possessed either nationalist undertones or that very rare socialist backing have been focussed upon, while anarchist-led strikes and organisations have often been, at worst, eliminated from Cuban labour historiography or, at best, under-estimated. The importance of all things socialist, such as the Russian Revolution and the importance of Marxist-Leninist literature on the thoughts and actions of workers in Cuba, in particular, appears to have been over-played.

A major and indispensable work on the history of the Cuban labour movement is not attributed to any one writer or even to a collective: charting the movement from 1865 to 1958 over four volumes (including two that reproduce important documents and articles from the period), *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano* is dedicated to the third congress of the PCC and its author is named as the Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba anexo al Comité

Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba (*Institute of History of the Cuban Communist and Revolutionary Socialist Movement, annexed to the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party*).[2] In the period that concerns us here, part of Volume 1 details the "triumph of the great Socialist October Revolution" in Russia and analyses the impact of that remarkable event in other parts of Latin America and, in particular, Cuba. The October Revolution is an essential topic of study if one is to comprehend much of the politics of the twentieth century and especially the emergence of Marxism-Leninism and the Cuban Revolution, and many Cuban authors have understandably underlined the significance of the event. According to the official Cuban version:

> Desde 1917-1918, como resultado de la influencia de la victoriosa Revolución de Octubre de Rusia ... el movimiento obrero cubano entra en una fase nueva, superior. Se produce un notable ascenso en la conciencia de clase y en la combatividad de los trabajadores, en la lucha por su unidad y organización (*From 1917 to 1918, as a result of the influence of the victorious October Revolution in Russia ... the Cuban labour movement entered into a new, superior phase. There was a notable increase in class consciousness and in the fighting spirit of the workers, in the struggle for unity and organisation*) [IHMCRSC, a, 1985: 196].

What this statement does not take into account is that, only two years before, the movement had been subject to particularly harsh treatment by the authorities, from which, in 1917, it was only just recovering. The organisational drive, furthermore, came not from the weak socialist element in Cuba but from the anarcho-syndicalists. "La violenta ruptura de hostilidades entre anarquistas y comunistas" (*The violent outbreak of hostilities between anarchists and communists*) [Aguirre,1965: 81] that changed course as a result of events in Russia (and the Cuban government's interpretation and fear of the Revolution) had never been as pronounced in Cuba as it was elsewhere, due to the scant attraction of socialism there.

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[2] These works are referenced from now on as IHMCRSC.

Serviat has rightly pointed out that the ideological current within the Cuban labour movement that was most affected by the Russian Revolution was anarcho-syndicalism [Serviat, 1967: 12], unsurprisingly, as it was the most popular leftist view at that time and so its adherents were the workers most likely to be informed of events through meetings and publications. Cabrera has contended that the influence on those workers was colossal:

> La búsqueda y utilización de los textos marxistaleninistas se hizo cotidiana entre los grupos más avanzados de la clase obrera. Se citaba a Lenin a cada paso, las obras didácticas proletarias seguían los lineamientos marcados por la Revolución Rusa (*The search for and use of Marxist-Leninist texts increased daily among the more advanced of the working class. Lenin was quoted at every opportunity, didactic proletarian works followed the outlines marked out by the Russian Revolution*) [Cabrera, 1985: 203].

As Córdova has noted, initial reports of the socialist revolution were not to be found in those publications dedicated to workers, but among the pages of the Havana bourgeois press [Córdova, 1997: 128], by those who wished to prevent copycat uprisings that might affect personal wealth and business. It is true that, after October 1917, Lenin's writings and speeches were more widely used and discussed (none had reached the masses outside Russia anywhere before that date), although, if some workers agreed with his ideas, others did not and those who questioned the ideals of Lenin increased in number as information regarding Bolshevik persecution of workers (and others) reached foreign shores. In Cuba, condemnation of atrocities being committed in the new Republic was published in the worker press, a muted point in post-1959 Cuban analysis.

The common assertion that the era of Marxism-Leninism was a period of heightened class-consciousness is misleading, and somewhat unfair, as such comments imply that any effort at organisation and education prior to that era was weak and that workers had been ill-informed. In fact, some opinions are more than mere

insinuations: Cabrera - "hasta 1917 el movimiento obrero se caracterizó por esfuerzos islados e incoordinados" (*until 1917, the worker movement was characterised by isolated and uncoordinated efforts*) [Cabrera,1969: 45] or (referring to 1914) Tellería Toca – "Nada positiva era la situación obrera por esa época de mucha miseria y poca organización, de mucha politiquería en el país y poca conciencia clasista en sus trabajadores (*there was nothing positive about the worker situation during that period of much poverty and little organisation, of much party politics in the country and little class consciousness among the workers*) [Tellería Toca, 1972: 2].

Workers in Cuba had been organising along class lines for decades, especially in the tobacco industry, where artisans attempted to protect their own interests by forming unions, publishing worker periodicals and even calling anarchist conferences during the 1880s. The organisation of tobacco workers has been well documented and Jean Stubbs' detailed account of it stretches over both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries [Stubbs, 1985]. Other members of the urban worker community had successfully attempted organisation, including printers, construction workers and service industry workers, some forming unions that experienced a lull only during the War of Independence (1895-1898), renewing struggle as soon as it had reached a conclusion. In rural areas, the late abolition of slavery and its legacy stalled unionism in that industry.[3]

Traditions of slavery, colonialism, the War of Independence, continuing immigration, particularly from Spain (which survived well into the twentieth century) and neighbouring Caribbean islands (from around 1913), and the reliance on foreign economies meant that the early decades of the twentieth century was a period in which Cubans were still forging, or re-evaluating, a national identity (as in the USA or

[3] This is discussed more fully in Chapter 1.

Argentina, the notion of *Cubanidad*, or Cuban-ness, was not restricted to those who had been born in the country, history made it far more complex [Kapcia, 2000]). Shaffer has noted:

> ... in Cuba the international anarchist movement arose in an exceptionally fluid moment of the island's history when no recognised notion of national identity had yet been solidified [Shaffer, 1998: viii].

Shaffer has recognised that even though Marxism was not popular in Cuba until the late 1920s, that had not precluded among the workers a sense of belonging to a particular class; many knew what was, or should be, involved in class struggle. Anarchism prospered among a working class that found no comfort in party politics (besides many workers were disenfranchised) but who did not yet enjoy a sense of nationhood or *patria*, a concept detested by anarchists, who instead viewed the world in an international context.

The 1920s are commonly perceived to be a watershed in Cuban history, ushering in a period of the awakening of a national consciousness [Grobart, 1966; Silva León, 1997]. The romantic and nationalist theories of the Cuban patriot José Martí were resurrected almost in conjunction with the formation of the first Cuban communist party. That decade has been described as a time of the arrival of a political maturity in Cuba when communist organisers, apostles of Martí, finally realised the need for a national and social liberation for Cuba and, until the challenge of communism, it is argued, there had been no serious nationalist debate. Anarchists, in their efforts to rid society of the entire capitalist system, had not drawn any distinction between the (increasingly US owned) tobacco trusts and sugar plantations and other employers, so hampering nationalist sentiment among the workers. Only during the upsurge of nationalism in the 1920s, it has been maintained, did labour imagine that the USA was an all-powerful exploiter and dominator of Cubans [Silva León, 1997:45].

According to the bulk of historiography, this fusion of communism and nationalism in the 1920s, with all its animosity towards the United States of America (a feeling still harboured in present-day Cuba), is where the modern day history of the country truly begins. The downfall of anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba is often attributed to the foundation of the PCC. While it is certainly a fact that the popularity of anarchist-related thought was eclipsed by communism, it should not be assumed that one had passed its shelf life and was simply replaced by the other. Other, equally importantly factors, not least the limitations of unionism, internal quarrels and repression, which, until now, have not been analysed in detail, contributed to the demise of anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba,

The desire by Cuban historians to demonstrate that communism is, if not a Cuban phenomenon, a *cubanised* one, has led to the assumption that, conversely, anarchism was a doctrine transplanted to, and cultivated in, Cuba by Spanish immigrants. This argument has been upheld by Aguirre, del Toro and Silva León who have asserted that since anarchism was Spanish it was also unpatriotic and thus hindered the real independence of Cuba. Aguirre contends that at the dawn of independence from Spain, the majority of those tobacco workers who were anarchist were also mainly Spanish and possessed "el patriotismo desorientado y el internacionalism desorientado" (*misplaced patriotism and misplaced internationalism*) [Aguirre, 1965:80]. However, Aguirre has offered no analysis of anarchist ideology and no attempt has been made to assess the attitude of anarchists to nationhood. That anarchist-related doctrine does not pledge allegiance to any particular country (anarchist "patriotism" is instead expressed in its loyalty to the working class as a whole) has led to the assumption that anarchism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was unpatriotic.

The part that anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism played in educating and preparing the masses for the class struggle has also been downgraded and, instead, the study of Marxist-Leninist thought taken precedence. As Hennessy has suggested:

> As losers, anarchists have not had a good press. Praised for their militancy in the pre-1917 period, once there was the model for a vanguard Marxist Leninist party to be emulated, any refusal to do so was condemned as back-sliding or worse [Hennessy, 1988: 252].

Fernández, a Cuban anarchist who now lives in political exile in Miami, has charted much of the anarchist movement on the island, particularly through the publication (now ceased) of a magazine dedicated to the anarchist cause, *Guángara Libertaria*, and in his book *El Anarquismo en Cuba*. The former includes essays in which Fernández has detailed the events and personalities of late nineteenth-century anarchism in Cuba, while the latter charts the history of anarchism from its genesis in the 1860s to those anarchists who fled to the USA after the success of Castro's Revolution. While a refreshing account from an anarchist's perspective, Fernández's book fails to credit the Sindicato General Obrero de la Industria Fabril (*Manufacturing Industry Workers' General Union* – SGOIF), although he, like other Cuban historians studying the period, does acknowledge the undeniable presence of anarcho-syndicalists in two of the most important and cohesive worker unions of the 1920s, the Federación Obrera de la Habana (FOH) and the Confederación Nacional de Obreros Cubanos (CNOC). Unlike many writing on the subject, Fernández has realised that, from 1921:

> ... se inicia la etapa más constructiva del anarquismo en Cuba. La semilla plantada por los ácratas a finales de la década de 1880 se había convertido en aquel <Árbol de la LIbertad> que mencionara Roig San Martín,[4] y empezaba a dar frutos (*the most constructive stage of anarchism in Cuba began. The seed planted by the rebels at the end of the 1880s had become that "Tree of Liberty" referred to by Roig San Martín, and began to bear fruit* [Fernández, 2000:59].

[4] For more information on Roig San Martín, see Chapter 1.

The general consensus by post-revolutionary Cuban historians is that by 1920, anarchism in Cuba had all but begun to fade. Some, but not all, non-Cuban historians, however, have been less dismissive, such as Benjamin, who has pointed out that the CNOC was "founded and until 1928 dominated by anarchist leadership" (the CNOC ceased to exist in that year!) [Benjamin, 1975:70]. Liss has conceded that anarchists did help found that national worker Confederation "which by the late 1920s contained thirty-five trade unions and was affiliated with the Profintern, Moscow's 'Red Union' movement" [Liss, 1987:64], thus, once again disregarding the strength and importance of anarchists at that time.

More frustratingly, the role of the SGOIF within the Cuban labour movement has been almost entirely overlooked. Fernández does not even list the union's long running and popular mouthpiece, *El Progreso* [*Progress*], among those worker periodicals consulted in his bibliography and, less surprisingly, nor does that official Cuban publication, IHMCRSC. The occasional sentence has been dedicated to the union itself: Paláez Groba agreed that the SGOIF was the most combative force during the first half of the twentieth century [Paláez Groba, 1991:35]; Dimas mentioned the extremely long, hard-fought boycott of *La Polar* beer, that was declared by SGOIF members and backed by countless unions and workers throughout the country [Dimas, 1975:210]. That boycott was a drawn out, violent affair which can hardly be omitted from any labour study that concerns 1920s Havana but, by many, has been entirely ignored.

Page dedicated a paragraph to the boycott, stating that terrorists were responsible for placing poison in bottles of *La Polar*, resulting in the death of "several persons" [Page, 1952:59], although primary sources show that one worker died through drinking contaminated beer and the premise that "terrorists" carried out the act was not proven, the authorities ultimately failing to charge anyone with the deed.

According to Cabrera, the authorities themselves were the perpetrators of the crime, which was a near-successful attempt by them to frame leading members of the union [Cabrera, 1985:256]. It is, maybe, a more realistic explanation, and one certainly held by the SGOIF, but one that is also without evidence. I have dedicated Chapter 5 to analysing direct action declared by members of the SGOIF, and the boycott of *La Polar*, and the poisoning of it, deserves its own case study, being an important event that highlights the strength of feeling among urban workers and the measures they were prepared to take in order to fight employers, while simultaneously illustrating the solidarity shown by other workers in other trades and, as importantly, in other parts of the island.

Cabrera has maintained that some in the SGOIF caused friction in the labour movement:

> Algunos, muy sujetos a la doctrina anarquista, sostuvieron polémicas inútiles o críticas dañinas a la unidad obrera cuyos resultados fueron perjudiciales al movimiento revolucionario en general (*some, very given to the anarchist doctrine, maintained useless or critical polemics that damaged worker unity, the results of which were generally harmful to the revolutionary movement*) [Cabrera, 1985:255].

She is, no doubt, referring to the differences of opinion between some in the SGOIF and the FOH at the time of the sugar strikes of 1924, detailed here in Chapter 4. However, Cabrera has not taken into account the fact that, ordinarily, a mutual respect existed between the two unions, nor has she substantiated accusations that anarchism was the root cause of any discrepancies and, like many of her generation, she has simply assumed that any anarchist-related doctrine was an inferior product that the radical proletariat had embraced merely as a precursor to something more advanced. The fact that that the SGOIF set up an adult education centre and a rationalist school for children has been overlooked by everyone, except Shaffer, and the union has mainly attracted negative attention, if any. While not aiming to uphold

the SGOIF as a beacon in the history of the Cuban labour movement, this thesis does at least attempt to fill the large void left by others debating the subject.

Anarchism as an Ideology

If no sense of nationalism and little class consciousness existed before the advent of communism, what was the point of anarchism both before and during this period? Chapter 3 of this thesis, where I have underlined the hopes and tactics of the SGOIF specifically and anarcho-syndicalists generally, is concerned with the ideology of the union. But can anarchism be labelled an ideology? How is it defined?

Those attempting to analyse the philosophy of anarchism have observed that its flexible nature makes it difficult to define [Miller, 1984:2; Vincent, 1989:114]. Perhaps, then, any attempt to compartmentalise it should be avoided. Anarchists understand their system of beliefs and values to be evolutionary and not static: there exists no collective or central anarchist manifesto and its amorphous character does not facilitate the creation of one. To identify anarchism as an ideology is troublesome: it is tempting to define any "ism" as an ideology, but the absence of any generic anarchist philosophy appears to negate such definition. The perceived need to find a one-suits-all label for anarchism (and all "ideologies") has, in fact, meant that a vast array of thought, ideas and understandings has often been streamlined. For example, Ridley observed that theorists have tried to rationalise revolutionary syndicalism, in an attempt to arrange it into a logical sequence. To do this is "to treat it as something unified, whereas its ideas covered a whole range of divergent shades of opinion. Over-simplification is the result. And the result of that is distortion" [Ridley, 1973:3]. The same could be said of anarchism and its offshoots.

Examining the history of anarchism in Argentine trade unions, Thompson complains that historians have tried "to identify ideological consistency in the (labour) movement, and force the various currents into a series of conventional theoretical moulds" [Thompson, 1984:99]. However, anarchism is not consistent, she argues, it allows room for change and, as the anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker pointed out, "one cannot assign (to anarchism) any definite terminus nor any fixed goal" [Rocker, 1951:14], so, the question as to whether it is an ideology or not remains nebulous.

Eagleton has questioned why owners of any ideology deny that their system of beliefs is actually an ideology at all. To admit that one possesses an ideology, he argues, is to confess that one adheres to a fixed set of ideas that would be difficult to alter and, in this pejorative sense, ideology is seen as restrictive, allowing no room for manoeuvre [Eagleton, 1991:3]. Rigidity is particularly anathema to anarchism as the whole premise of anarchism relies on its flexible nature and, so, to classify it in this way would be alien to any anarchist. In his attempt to condense the meaning of the term anarchism, Berkman declared that it "teaches that we can live in a society where there is no compulsion of any kind" [Berkman, 1929:9], so to restrict anarchism would be interpreted (by the anarchist) as a kind of compulsion or lack of liberty to think and to act freely.

"For the American political theorist Edward Shils," Eagleton observed, "ideologies are explicit, closed, resistant to innovation, promulgated with a great deal of affectivity and require total adherence from their devotees" [Eagleton, 1991:4]. If this interpretation were true, an ideology cannot be altered and is inorganic, "But," observed the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta, "we do not want to harden our anarchism into dogma, nor impose it by force; it will be what it can be, and will develop....." [Malatesta, *Pensiero e Volantá*, 15/05/1924]. According to anarchists,

then, anarchism is amorphous, organic and spontaneous, possessing neither leaders nor anyone to impose his or her own will onto others.

In order to understand one's own position, Lukács maintained, it is first necessary to understand other ideologies so that one can competently fight against this *other* [see Eagleton, 1991:80]. Only then can a "true" class-consciousness be born. Anarchists have traditionally fought against authoritarian socialism as a viable option in replacing the existing social order, maintaining that it amounts to the oppression of the masses by the few. The debate as to whether a transitory state is needed after the revolution has been constantly thrashed out between Marxists and anarchists since Marx and Bakunin waged that ideological battle in the First International. Although both channels of thought agreed on the same ends, society without state, the means to achieving them differed. The important point here is that each group knows and understands the other's point of view and, being in opposition to it, forms its alternative ideology.

Anarchists have also compared and contrasted their model to liberalism: Malatesta affirmed:

> ...liberalism is in theory a kind of anarchy without socialism, and therefore is simply a lie, for freedom is not possible without equality, and real anarchy cannot exist without solidarity, without socialism [Malatesta, *l'Anarchia*, August 1896]

Writing some 40 years later, Rocker also likened the two:

> In common with Liberalism, Anarchism represents the idea that the happiness and prosperity of the individual must be the standard in all social matters. And, in common with the great representatives of liberal thought, it has also the idea of limiting the functions of government to a minimum... [Rocker, 1951:10]

Liberalism, Rocker went on to say, is the concept: "that government is best which governs least", while anarchism maintains: "that government is best which governs not at all" [Rocker, 1951:10]. Anarchism here is a method that criticises other ideologies and, in effect, forms its own ideology as a reaction against them. Anarchism thus can be observed as a negative ideology, that is, it challenges rather than creates. This is especially true if one takes the anarchist position vis-á-vis capitalism into consideration.

Eagleton discussed the opinion that capitalism nurtures revolution and that it is the oppressive nature of capitalist society that forces the downtrodden to question their own existence, or, capitalism creates revolutionaries [Eagleton, 1991:103]. Anarchism can be defined as the antithesis to capitalism: it is combative, in short, the ideology of anarchism is a form of defence against capitalism. In the words of Malatesta: "(Anarchism) is not necessarily linked to any philosophical system. (It) was born of a moral revolt against social injustice" [Malatesta, *Pensiero e Volantá*, 16/05/1925].

Anarchism negates the existing socio-political order: anarchism is dual-edged, being an amalgam of the awareness of other ideologies and systems, such as socialism, liberalism and capitalism, and a response to these, but it is also based on day-to-day experiences. Like any set of ideas, anarchism may be passed onto the masses by the theorists, through education and propaganda, and may be interpreted by anyone outside of the ruling class. Theory and practice come together here and anarchism becomes a synthesis of that which is made clear to the oppressed through teachings and that which is experienced first hand. Eagleton explained:

> A successful ideology must work both practically and theoretically, and discover some way of linking these levels. It must extend from an elaborated

> system of thought to the minutiae of everyday life, from a scholarly treatise to a shout in the street [Eagleton, 1991: 48].

Anarchism satisfies both these chief ingredients. From Bakunin to present-day anarchists, it has been widely accepted that anarchism must be fought on two fronts, through education and direct action. Anarcho-syndicalism may be seen as a further development of this double attack; it promises the final emancipation of the working class and it strives for immediate financial and social gains. Through direct action (strikes, sabotage and boycotts, in particular), anarcho-syndicalism aims eventually to overthrow the state, ridding society of government, religion and capitalism, in order that the workers, through unionisation, take control of the means of production. Any gains secured in preparation for the Revolution, whether shorter working days, the right to associate or a raise in wages, can only benefit the masses and strengthen the anarcho-syndicalist cause.

Although anarchists, like many revolutionaries, may not consider their way of thinking to be ideological – as Eagleton pointed out: "Ideology, like halitosis, is ... what the other person has" [Eagleton, 1991: 2] – anarchism certainly possesses some of the criteria to be termed an ideology. In the negative sense of the word, it is an ideology because in is in opposition to other ways of living, that is, it is a revolt against the state. More positively, anarchism is an ideology because it is partly formed through class-consciousness, being at once experiential and able to analyse and assess other ideologies in order to design a response to them.

If so many workers in Cuba adhered to anarchist-related doctrine years before the foundation of a communist party there, then, they possessed class-consciousness. They were aware of their position in society and joined the class war in an attempt to change that, a claim that is supported throughout this thesis by the documentation

and analysis of union statutes, worker action and quotes from the Cuban worker press.

Methodology

This thesis is not a comparative study of manufacturing industry workers with those from any other industry either within Cuba or outside the country. I could have, for example, compared and contrasted urban brewery workers with rural sugar industry workers, the former belonging to a nascent and still small industry and the latter employed in an industry so large and financially viable that it had been deemed necessary to import thousand upon thousands of slaves until the late nineteenth century. The sugar industry had experienced huge growth during the early years of US hegemony, when mills (and thus workers) were subjected to rationalisation, something that urban factories, being relatively new, did not experience, most of the workers being employed as unskilled hands from the start and who were not, therefore, victims of deskilling, but who still managed to form a large, all-encompassing union long before those in the more geographically dispersed sugar areas.

A study of tobacco workers, who had the oldest tradition of unionism in the country and who were the first to embrace anarchism, would have sat comfortably next to an analysis of the SGOIF, which was not founded until 1917, by which time the tobacco unions were exclusively reformist (I use the term reformist to refer to those unions that worked with employers and the state, rather than against them, to achieve benefits for their members). It would also have been interesting to have weighed the longevity of *El Progreso* against any number of the short-lived, left-wing worker

periodicals of 1920s Cuba, such as *Acción Consciente*, *Acción Libertaria*, *Anda*, *Tiempos Nuevos*, *Nueva Luz*, *Justicia* or ¡*Tierra*!.[5]

Alternatively, I could have compared the rise and fall of the SGOIF and *El Progreso* with the United Brewery Workers of the USA, which, like the SGOIF in Cuba, was one of the very first unions to embrace industrial unionism in that country and whose president, William E. Trautmann, was a founding member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and editor of *Brauer Zeitung*, a union mouthpiece written by and dedicated to the rank-and-file of the US brewing industry.

I chose to do none of this as, I believe, the SGOIF merits its own study. That the union grouped together never before unionised workers (as a group of workers in that industry), that it was the first union in Cuba to organise along industrial lines and that it successfully printed its own periodical for five years are reasons enough. In addition, the union condoned the use of direct action (and many union members were arrested, deported or murdered for their – sometimes only alleged – roles in the use of that action). Furthermore, it was extremely influential in the FOH and the CNOC, while the downfall of anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba has been attributed to the collapse of the SGOIF. Taking these factors into account, it becomes clear that the union makes for an engaging investigation.

The near-omission of anarcho-syndicalism from the history of Cuba has been outlined above. Having consulted many secondary sources in Britain, mostly books and newspaper articles, it became apparent that the oversight was general and, deciding to investigate the real force of the ideology in Cuba, I travelled to the International Institute of Social History (IISG) in Holland in order to consult sources there. I had already familiarised myself with the broader history of Cuba through the

[5] Although ¡*Tierra*! survived from 1902 until 1914, its second phase was only for one year (1924-1925)

study of some of the Foreign Office records in London (at the Public Records Office in Kew), in addition to general history books on Cuba, the USA and Latin America. Likewise, it was important to examine the archives at the IISG and to formulate a further research plan before making the longer trip to Havana. In Amsterdam, I uncovered editions of *El Progreso* from 1924 and 1925, the study of which highlighted the importance of the SGOIF in the history of the Cuban labour movement, a union that, until then, I had barely heard of. The conceptual framework of this thesis rests heavily on the textual analysis and interpretation of *El Progreso* (almost every edition ever printed from 1920 to 1925 is available for consultation at the Institute of History in Havana) and the archival analysis of sources uncovered at the Cuban National Archives, which included contemporary Cuban Government files on many unions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, not least on the SGOIF, the FOH and the CNOC.

My research was not designed to be an analysis of the SGOIF alone. While it was important that I look at the "union line" as well as the reality that the workers faced and why they would (indeed whether they did) subscribe to a world-view that was much touted in the union halls and literature, it was also vital that I study periodicals dedicated to those working in other trades (printers, tobacco workers or chefs, for example) and those that offered other points of view (anarcho-naturist, reformist, bourgeois), in order to obtain a clearer picture and to ensure that I did not approach the question one-dimensionally. The thesis draws upon vast the qualitative data that I analysed and interpreted from many sources.

I have separated this thesis into five chapters. Firstly "The Development of the Cuban Labour Movement – A Historical Context" details the economic, political and social atmosphere in Cuba leading up to and during the period in which the SGOIF existed, looking at Cuba both in a domestic and an international context. This first

chapter also traces the rise of unionism in Cuba, looking at direct worker action (and important strikes, in particular) and conferences, whilst acknowledging the advent of communism and changing attitudes among the workers. It is hoped that this will allow the reader to get an impression of what was happening in Cuba around the time of the lifespan of the SGOIF and to understand the tradition (albeit a short tradition) of unionism on the island prior to its foundation.

Chapter 2 is a short account of the anarchist unions that existed prior to the SGOIF and that were dedicated to those employed in the bars, cafes, hotels and restaurants of Cuba, in general, and Havana, in particular. The importance of these workers as regards this thesis is that many shared a knowledge of and supported direct action and industrial unionism in the years before a strong manufacturing sector, and so union, was formed in Cuba. "Forerunners to the SGOIF" illustrates that members of the SGOIF were not the first to espouse anarcho-syndicalism or to propagate it through their union's periodical, an event attributed to those working in Cuba's service industry during the early 1900s. The chapter studies what could be termed the evolutionary process of anarcho-syndicalism and also gives a brief introduction to the SGOIF, analysing why workers were propelled to found a union dedicated exclusively to factory workers, leading to chapter 3, in which the reader is invited to consider anarcho-syndicalist theory versus practice.

"Pie in the Sky and Pork-Chop Mentality" examines the purpose of the union, or its ideology, while taking time to consider the structure of the union and how it was run. It also concentrates on individual worker leaders, in order to determine if and how they differed from non-committee members. I ask what might have encouraged some to renounce the leftist ideas and attitudes that they once embraced for more conservative ones and how those seen as traitors (*amarillistas*) to the anarcho-syndicalist cause were treated by the union, through analysis of *El Progreso*. This

section looks at how anarchists became suspicious (and even paranoid) of any worker-leader who did not wholly embrace anarcho-syndicalism, in particular. The chapter then goes on to give details of the workers themselves, an important study that helps the reader to get a sense of who the workers were, where they came from, where they worked and whether they supported the union. Unions could not exist without the rank-and-file and so I have attempted to give an overview of those whom the SGOIF represented.

Chapter 4 illustrates how the SGOIF drew upon the reality of those workers in a bid to form along industrial lines, a type of unionism that had recently grown in popularity among workers in the neighbouring USA. "The Struggle for Industrial Unionism" uncovers why industrial unionism appeared to be the best form of organisation, given the mix of gender, provenance and race of many of those who worked in the new factories of Havana. It also looks at SGOIF's relationship with other unions at the time and especially the numerically and historically important regional FOH and the national CNOC, giving an insight into the popularity (or not) of the SGOIF among workers in other unions and other parts of the country, a theme that is continued In Chapter 5.

"Anarcho-syndicalism and Direct Action as a Revolutionary Tool" shows how the union and its members used boycotts, sabotage and strikes as a means to achieving emancipation, showing how the ideas of direct action evolved into practical tools in the struggle for revolution. The precepts of direct action were not only condoned and propagated in *El Progreso* but were also embraced by the workers, and chapter 5 highlights the application of these tactics by union members. I have made a case study of the extremely long consumer boycott of *La Polar* beer, concentrating on the motivation for such action, its evolution into something altogether more sinister, the reporting of the boycott among those both sympathetic and non-sympathetic to it and

the attention and support it drew from the rank-and-file. I also relate how the authorities used the boycott at *La Polar* and other incidents of violent worker action to justify the closure of the SGOIF and the clampdown on unionism in Cuba in general. The story ends with the rise of President Gerado Machado in 1925 and his determination to appease US business fears with regard to the "labour question".

In my conclusion, I have summed up the arguments of this thesis, laying out the reasons for the ultimate failure of the SGOIF and anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba, a left-wing doctrine that collapsed and was forever eclipsed by the rising power of communism.

Chapter1

The Development of the Cuban Labour Movement – A Historical Context.

Any study of the Cuban labour movement in the 1920s must begin with an understanding of the state of the country at that point and with an analysis of conditions in the years leading up to it. The formation of a workforce influenced by any ideology depends on many socio-political and economic factors, both domestic and foreign. In Cuba, the persistence of a functioning slave trade, and then its abolition, the struggle to end Spanish colonialism, the growth of capitalism, the extensive influence of the USA (and fear of occupation or annexation by that country), the attitude of the government at home and working conditions all contributed to the mentality and actions of workers. For this reason, this chapter is concerned with the 70-year period leading up to the collapse of anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba, in an attempt to trace both the history of a working-class movement that vied with the system and the circumstances in which workers were placed.

The chapter has been divided into three sections. Firstly it traces the Cuba of the late nineteenth century (From Slavery to Independence), commenting on national politics and the genesis of labour organisation. It then analyses the early days of the Republic from 1898 to 1917 (La República Mediatizada), a section that, while following the development of the labour movement, pays particular attention to US influence on the island, an examination that continues in the final part of the chapter (The Building of Unions, Federations and Confederations). Part 3 looks at the period 1917 to 1925, the life-span of the subject of this thesis, the Sindicato General Obrero de la Industria Fabril [SGOIF] (*The General Workers' Union of the Manufacturing Industry*), detailing the workers' movement in Cuba as a whole.

From Slavery to Independence

Cuba had relied on African slave labour until 1886 when, alongside Brazil, it became the last country in the Western Hemisphere to completely outlaw the practice. Slavery was an important issue for the creole elite (*criollos*), that is, those white families of Spanish descent who had relaxed ties with the mother country and who, unlike the *peninsulares* (those born in Spain), possessed no political power. From the mid-nineteenth century some landed *criollos* sought the annexation of Cuba to the United States, which, they believed, would prolong slavery in Cuba, while many US planters in the southern United States hoped that the acquisition of Cuba would help to uphold slavery, strengthening their own cause.

With the success of the northern states in the US Civil War, however, the Cuban oligarchy anticipated that the emancipation of slaves or even a possible slave revolt would now be the result of annexation. Attitudes towards annexation by the USA thus changed and many *criollos*, conceding that the demise of slavery in Cuba was inevitable (it had been outlawed internationally), now supported the gradual abolition of slavery coupled with compensation to landowners by the Spanish state. A new political party, the Reformist Party, expounded these ideas. It was, however, short-lived and was dissolved in 1868 shortly after a rebellion by the military in Spain when, ousting the increasingly unpopular Isabel II, revolts flared up on the mainland. Threatened by the possibility of a social revolution, the oligarchy declared worker associations and some new political parties illegal and enforced censorship in Spain. This paranoia was soon felt in Cuba by a new regime that had become suspicious of the new Cuban party's liberalism and, moreover, that had the power to destroy it.

As Cuba was a Spanish colony, the two countries had become trading partners and the bulk of businesses in Cuba were owned by peninsular and creole businessmen

and oligarchic families. From the nineteenth century, however, the economic growth of the United States meant that a new trading partner was beginning to emerge and the warning bells of dependency began to sound very early on in this relationship. A financial crisis, offset by the end of the Crimean War in 1856, caused alarm in the USA when the decline in the demand for wheat not only affected farmers but also had a negative effect on the shipping industry. A panic ensued on Wall Street and a protective tariff on Cuban exports was imposed by the USA. Due to the differing nature of the two main industries in Cuba, sugar and tobacco, the economic difficulties arising from the tariff were not dealt with by those industries in the same way. Part of the tobacco industry responded by relocating to the USA, taking with it many experienced employees, an action made possible by the type of worker employed in the tobacco industry and by issues of crop transportation: whereas sugar was mostly still planted and cultivated by slaves, cigar factories employed skilled and (paid) workers, who enjoyed freedom of movement. Furthermore, it was more necessary for the comparatively heavy and cheap sugar to be processed close to the plantations while tobacco could be grown in the western provinces of Cuba, especially in Pinar del Río and then transported to nearby Florida for rolling. Factories sprang up in areas such as Tampa and Key West, while the skilled workers who remained in cigar factories in and around Havana went on to form the genesis of organised labour in Cuba.[6]

This new worker organisation was based on mutualism,[7] a response to the precarious financial position of the workers. Mutual aid societies protected members from the economic hardships of unemployment or falling wages, helping families as well as individuals to cope with unforeseen changes in the industry, as had occurred as a direct result of the 1857 financial crisis, for example. The societies also assisted

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[6] For more information on cigar workers in Cuba see Stubbs, 1985:93.
[7] Exclusively white and exclusively black mutual aid societies that offered sickness benefit were also formed among other workers in Havana and were linked to local parishes [see Thomas, 1998:236/7].

financially those workers suffering from ill-health, a requirement highlighted by a cholera epidemic in 1855 [Portuondo, 1961:15]. The need for mutual aid was coupled with a realisation that social reform could also benefit the workers and, in 1865, the Asturian-born Saturnino Martínez began publication of *La Aurora*, a periodical dedicated to workers in Cuba's tobacco factories. [8]

As a result of the 1868 revolution in Spain, *La Aurora* closed, the return to Spanish conservatism bringing not only political but also social repression to Cuba.[9] The revolution in Spain provided a catalyst for the discontent already apparent among many pockets of the Cuban community. Spain imposed taxes on both Cuban imports and exports, while the USA retaliated by raising tariffs on Cuban goods, contributing to the overall dark mood in a country that was sinking further into recession. Eastern Cuba rose up against the injustices and limitations of Spanish rule, when, on 10 October 1868, the *Grito de Yara* demanded social and economic reform. The subsequent rebellion lasted ten years.

The Ten Years War had halted worker solidarity. However, with the 1878 Pact of Zanjón, a treaty agreed on by Spain and rebel leaders in Cuba in the wake of the war, reforms were introduced into Cuba. Political control was relaxed and the press became less restricted by censorship, while workers' unions and the Partido Autonomista (*Autonomist Party*), which bore resemblance to the Reformist Party that preceded it, were founded. [10]

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[8] Martínez emigrated to Cuba as a young man and found employment in Jaime Partagas cigar factory in Havana. He also worked in the library of the Sociedad Económica, after being educated in literature and politics at the Liceo de Guanabacoa (a cultural centre for working-class white workers). He was connected to the Reformist Party and its periodical *El Siglo*, which advocated reform. He abandoned the labour movement during the early 1890s and was appointed secretary to the Chamber of Commerce.

[9] A strike at the Cabañas y Carvajal factory in Havana in 1869 was repressed by the authorities, for example.

[10] As the name suggests, the Autonomist Party sought autonomy with Spain and the right to free trade. The Partido Unión Constitucional, on the other hand, desired the continued total rule of Cuba by Spain. Both parties required a peaceful solution to the question of governance in Cuba.

In the workplace, artisans and tobacco workers, the aristocracy of labour, eager to protect their jobs from the mass of Spanish immigrants, were among the first to unite. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, southern Europeans began to respond to the push-pull effects of immigration and sought new lives throughout the Americas. The push of poverty, persecution and repression from their native countries, coupled with the pull of economic betterment and the promise of employment in the New World persuaded millions to emigrate. Due to political, cultural and linguistic ties, the bulk of new arrivals into Cuba at this time were those fleeing poverty from Spain.

Some Spanish workers brought to the Americas those revolutionary ideologies that were growing in popularity in their homeland and anarchism had flourished in a country that was riddled with poverty and that boasted a corrupt political system that relied on *caciquismo.*[11] The seeds of anarchism were sown in Cuba. However, it is erroneous to suppose that many of the immigrants, the bulk of whom were peasants and labourers from distressed areas of Spain, in particular Galicia, travelled to Cuba to disseminate or practise radicalism. On the contrary, many would probably have had the intention of raising funds to take or send home, never aiming to spoil their chances by spreading revolutionary philosophy. However, the harsh reality of life in Cuba may have urged some to revisit radical ideas that would have been particularly attractive to those workers denied suffrage (the voting system in Cuba is discussed below). Although Spanish workers may have introduced new ways of thinking, some Cuban workers were quick to understand the potential benefits of these ideologies

[11] Carr defines *caciquismo* as "the system of electoral corruption and management, run by local bosses, which supported the *turno pacífico* (the rigged alternation in power of the Liberal and Liberal Conservative parties)" [Carr, 1985:xv].

and, in the decade after the Ten Years War, both reformist and anarchist associations were set up and periodicals launched.[12]

In 1887, the first workers' congress held in Cuba was staged jointly by the Círculo de Trabajadores, the Junta Central de Trabajadores and *El Productor* (*The Producer*), the worker periodical initially published to help publicise the Congress [Casanovas Codina, 1995:26]. Anarchist in nature[13], the Congress aimed to unify workers through a Federación de Trabajadores de la Región Cubana [FTRC] (*Workers' Federation for the Region of Cuba*), a national association along the lines of the Bakuninist Federación de los Trabajadores de la Región Española [FTRE]. Members of the Congress emphasised the importance of the international struggle and urged solidarity with the men who would come to be known as the Chicago Martyrs.[14]

In the tobacco industry, new reformist and anarchist unions were formed that courted those skilled workers often referred to as "aristocrats of labour", that is those who were better paid and more highly skilled than others in the industry.[15] Many of these skilled workers formed either under the banner of La Unión Obrera [UO] (*The Workers' Union*), set up in 1888 by the reformist Saturnino Martínez, or La Alianza Obrera [AO] (*The Workers' Allliance*), founded by the Cuban anarcho-syndicalist

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[12] In 1878 *El Boletín* (The Bulletin), a reformist monthly publication dedicated to printers and the Gremio de Obreros del Ramo de Tabaquerías (*Tobacco Workers' Union*) were formed.
Anarchist publications included *El Obrero* (The Worker) [Cienfuegos, founded 1884] and *El Artesano* (The Artisan) [Havana, founded 1885]. Anarchist associations around this time included La Junta Central de Artesanos (*The Central Artisans' Assembly*) [founded 1879], later reorganised as La Junta Central de Trabajadores (*Central Workers' Assembly*) and the Círculo de Trabajadores de la Habana (*Workers' Circle of Havana*) [founded 1885]. For more information, see IHMRSC (1), 1985: 45-49.

[13] Disenfranchisement spurred some to turn to anarchism

[14] On 11th November 1886, Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel and Adolph Fischer were hanged by US authorities for their alleged part in the bombing of a labour meeting, held to protest against police violence, in Haymarket Square Chicago in May of that year. The four men (along with Louis Lingg, who committed suicide before the due execution) are known as the Chicago Martyrs, the world-wide 1st May commemorations being held in their honour.

[15] Stubbs [1985:73-81] argues that the application of the term "labour aristocrats" to Cuban cigar makers is a misnomer.

Enrique Roig San Martín.[16] That Roig was born in Cuba is of interest here, given the traditional view that adherents to anarchism and its offshoots were almost exclusively Spanish.[17]

Roig had always considered himself a staunch supporter of the class war above any other and was unwilling to accept that the working class should join any fight to free Cuba from Spanish rule. Since all rulers are potential tyrants, according to anarchism, any move to replace one government with another was seen by Roig as counterproductive. His views were echoed in the columns of *El Productor* until his death in 1889. The refusal of Cuban anarchists to join the growing separatist movement in Cuba died with Roig and, shortly after his death, pro-independence articles began to appear in *El Productor*:

> El obrero jamás debe olvidar su patria, porque ese amor es innato a todo ser racional (*The worker must never forget his native land as that love is innate to every rational being)* [*El Productor,* 09/02/1890].

Speaking of those tobacco workers who had fled to the USA to find employment, the anarchist worker leader Enrique Creci[18] wrote :

> ...dije más que (sic) una vez que los patriotas que estaban en Cayo Hueso y Tampa hacían falta en Cuba, porque así se realizaría más pronto la independencia (*I have said more than once that the patriots who were in Key West and Tampa were needed in Cuba, as this is how independence would have been reached more swiftly*) [quoted in Cabrera, 1979:144].

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[16] Roig San Martín (1843-1889) was a Havana-born anarchist and worker leader and a co-founder of the Centro de Instrucción y Recreo (Centre of Instruction and Recreation) in 1882, set up to promote solidarity among workers. He advocated class war and, due to his refusal to support the separatist movement, history has recorded him as unpatriotic [see IHMCRSC, a, 1985: 58]. Founder of *El Productor.*

[17] See Introduction.

[18] Creci was a Cuban typographer and anarchist. The editor of numerous worker periodicals, including *El Obrereo, El Trabajo, La Lechuza* and *Archivo Social*, he was active in the Círculo de Trabajadores and JCA and a participant in the 1887 and 1892 worker congresses (see below for information on the 1892 congress). He died in the battle for independence in Matanzas in 1896. For more information, see Cabrera, 1979.

The dilemma of whether or not to join political or military struggles is one that has often been faced by anarchists.[19] During the early 1890s, the Cuban working class, confronted with the realities of a repressive Spanish government and no doubt influenced by the growing propaganda made by highly regarded Cubans such as José Martí[20] and Antonio Maceo,[21] embraced notions of a *Cuba Libre.* The imprisonment of worker leaders such as Creci, the temporary suspension of worker institutions such as El Círculo de Trabajadores and *El Productor* (1890) and strikes that progressed into bloody confrontations between anti-colonial factions and pro-Spanish forces[22] fuelled anti-Spanish feeling among the workers, inspiring them to join the struggle for independence.

A Workers' Congress, held in Havana, 15-19 January 1892, had confirmed anarchist support on the island for the independence movement. The Congress, organised, like its predecessor, by the Junta Central de Trabajadores and promoted by *El Productor*, called for international worker solidarity, while adhering to the anarcho-syndicalist position that a general strike must be realised in Cuba in order to secure the eight-hour working day. The anarchist worker leader Eduardo González Bobés[23] noted that the General Strike could be the only true path to achieving success in gaining worker demands, as partial strikes had, in the main, proven ineffective and so a general strike was set for May 1st of that same year. As leaders of the independence movement acknowledged the benefit of linking the workers' movement to their own cause, so anarchists realised the need to create a broader, more popular, base if their own actions, such as the General Strike, were to prove

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[19] Malatesta and Kropotkin could not agree on the anarchist position in "The Great War", for example.
[20] José Martí (1853-1895) was a Cuban independence leader. Thinker, organiser, writer and politician, he was co-founder of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (*Cuban Revolutionary Party*) [PRC]. He died in battle in the War of Independence.
[21] Antonio Maceo (1848-1896) was a Cuban rebel. Known as the "Bronze Titan" in Cuba, he fought in the 1868-1878 war and he died in battle in the War of Independence.
[22] See Casanovas, 1995, for more information.
[23] Asturian-born Bobés arrived in Cuba in 1885 as a fifteen-year old apprentice. Initially anarchist and active in the 1892 Congress, he enlisted in the Cuerpo de Voluntarios (Voluntary Corps), a Spanish paramilitary body set up to quash the independence movement. During the early Republic, he became involved in bourgeois politics.

successful. The two factions courted each other, giving rise to a powerful movement that would eventually help to overthrow the Spanish colonisers.

La República Mediatizada (*The Annexed Republic*)[24]

The Cuban War of Independence (1895-98), which should have resulted in the replacement of a Spanish Government by a Cuban one, has, due to the involvement of US troops toward the end of the war, usually been labelled the Spanish-American War and even the Spanish-American-Cuban War [Ibarra, 1992:1]. US participation in the war has also led to the conflict being referred to as the world's first imperialist intervention [Ibarra, 1964:4]. An explosion on the US vessel "Maine" in Havana harbour, and with it the loss 260 US Marines [Aguilar, 1993:33], led the US Government to declare war on Spain, an act which helped to secure the defeat of the colonisers.[25]

In December 1898, President McKinley announced to Congress that US occupation of Cuba was essential "until there is complete tranquillity in the island and a stable government inaugurated" [Thomas, 1998:436]. This stable government was not considered ready until more than three years after the defeat of Spain, when the US-educated General Tomás Estrada Palma took presidential office in 1902.[26] As US occupation ended, it left in place the Platt Amendment, Article Three of which stated:

> that upon transfer of the control of Cuba to the government established under the new Constitution, Cuba consents that the US reserve and retain the right of intervention of the preservation of Cuban independence and the

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[24] This is a phrase often used by contemporary Cuban historians to describe the early period of the Republic of Cuba and refers to the influence of the United States of America over Cuba [eg. Torres Hernández, 1973].

[25] The USA has been suspected of orchestrating the attack on their own ship in order to justify intervention in the three-year old War of Independence and subsequent occupation of the island.

[26] From 1899 to the inauguration of Estrada Palma, US Generals John Brooke and Leonard Wood were Military Governors in Cuba.

> maintenance of stable government, adequately protecting life, property and individual liberty ... [quoted in Thomas, 1998: 451/2].

The first Cuban Constitution, signed in February 1901 by 29 Cuban delegates, endorsed the Platt Amendment or "the compromise between annexation and complete independence" [Langley, 1968: 118], which was to become an integral part of the new nation's make-up. The Amendment was concerned with stability and order in Cuba and although, in name, the island boasted the long-awaited and fought-for title of "The Republic of Cuba", any disorder in the country could be potentially interpreted as threatening to US interests, resulting in occupation, rather than the *Cuba Libre* that many had envisaged.

During the War of Independence, land had been spoiled or neglected, while it is estimated that some 200,000 of the island's population died due to hostilities, starvation or disease [Langley 1968:116]. Furthermore, national institutions began to vanish in the aftermath of the defeat of Spain. Revolutionary clubs were dissolved on the premise that the existence of such bodies need not continue, since independence had been won and hence there was no longer anything to fight for or against. The PRC was dissolved in December 1898 and, some five months later, the revolutionary Ejército Libertador [Liberation Army] suffered the same fate, an action described as "un serio revés para el pueblo" (*a serious reverse for the nation*) [Ibarra, 1964: 7]. Pérez has pointed out that workers on the island felt betrayed by the outcome of the war and disillusioned with the new republic as they "had sacrificed selflessly and unstintingly of behalf of *Cuba Libre*, only to find the republic little more than a new political carapace of the old colonial system" [Pérez, 1986: 61].

80% of sugar plantations had been ruined during the war years and the tobacco industry was in a state of turmoil. With a national debt of $US 500 million[27] [Langley, 1968:116], many Cuban landowners experienced bankruptcy and much of the land and businesses were rejuvenated by foreign, mostly US and British, capital. Although investment in industry and infrastructure must have been a welcome relief to the war-torn country in the short-term, Cuba was placed at the financial, and so political, mercy of interests from outside Cuba. Even the exchange of land was undertaken in US dollars. In January 1899, President McKinley introduced Decree No.123, which stipulated that any official business be conducted in US currency and that an exchange rate mechanism be established to convert Spanish and French currencies into US dollars. The new monetary scale undervalued European currency, although workers continued to receive wages in Spanish pesos or French Louis and, until the introduction of an indigenous currency in 1914, pay packets represented less than their true value.

Adverse economic policies and the lack of political and social stability caused confusion among a population, who, at the turn of the twentieth century, had no strong institutions within which to voice discontent. This lack of representation was experienced on many fronts. Firstly, entry into the political system by Cubans was hindered by US occupation and, secondly, many unions had disappeared during the recent conflict. Furthermore, Cuba had, by US and Latin American standards, a relatively secularised society:

> The Catholic Church has never exercised a strong political influence. It had been discredited during the Wars of Independence through its attitude towards Spain. It had not seriously tried to proselytize the slaves (Hennessy, 1970:216].

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[27] Throughout this thesis I have distinguished between US Dollars ($US) and Cuban Pesos ($).

The church was not a strong institution and one might conjecture that strong ideological beliefs may have acted as a replacement for religious ones.

Against such a backdrop, some new periodicals, political parties and worker organisations began to appear in Cuba in 1899. The anarchist Adrián Del Valle[28] founded periodicals such as *Tiempos Nuevos* and *El Nuevo Ideal,* which reported on worker action and called upon readers to organise. When Malatesta arrived in Cuba in February 1900, he was banned from public speaking by the government and, instead, communicated with the workers of Cuba through *El Nuevo Ideal,* urging them not to fall into the trap of being divided by race or nationality but to come together as a class in order to fight the common enemy, which he saw as the US government. [*El Nuevo Ideal*, 22/03/1900: 1].

Many of those who became politically active had made up part of the émigré community that had formed in Tampa and Key West: tobacco workers who, in the light of independence from Spain, sought repatriation in Cuba. Once again on home ground, however, their search for employment was not always fruitful and, undercut by Spanish workers, the jobs offered to them did not always yield the wages to which such highly skilled workers had become used. According to the 1899 Cuban Census, 96% of white foreign males were engaged in general employment, as compared to just 61.3% of white Cuban males, and this reality of work displacement converted into nationalism, as Spanish workers were welcomed "at the expense of nationals whose access to some of the best paid jobs was severely limited" [de la Fuente, 1997: 31]. Organisations set up by repatriates tended to concentrate on the injustice of discrimination against Cuban workers in favour of Spanish tobacco

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[28] Del Valle was a Catalonian anarchist writer who had worked as a journalist for *El Productor* of Barcelona. He was expelled shortly after arriving in Cuba in 1895, when he joined the "Free Cuba" campaign in New York. After the War of Independence, he returned to Cuba where he wrote many novels and articles in worker periodicals, often under the pseudonym Palmirio de Lidia.

workers, in particular, who had become known by the derogatory term *tabaquerones* [Ibarra, 1992:138]. The Partido Socialista Cubano (*Cuban Socialist Party*) [PSC] and the Liga General de Trabajadores Cubanos (*General League of Cuban Workers*) [LGTC], both founded in 1899, were particularly concerned with the plight of Cuban tobacco workers.

The presence of foreign capital on the island, and in particular the growth of tobacco and sugar trusts, awakened a sense of anti-capitalism in Cuba during the early years of the Republic. Returning to Cuba from the USA, the intellectual Diego Vicente Tejera[29] urged workers to face the new horrors of capitalism. Like other Latin American intellectuals who had visited Europe during the late nineteenth century,[30] Tejera wished to incorporate into Cuban politics the socialist ideologies he had encountered abroad and, in March 1899, he founded Cuba's first socialist party, the PSC. Although not a tobacco worker, Tejera was clearly concerned with the state of the tobacco industry in Cuba:

> El Capitalismo - ¡y un capitalismo extranjero! – se organizará en esta rica y virgen tierra de la manera más incontrastable y odiosa: la del "trust" (*Capitalism – and a foreign capitalism – will organise itself in the this rich and virgin territory in a most insuperable and hateful manner: that of the trust*) [PSC Manifesto in IHMCRSC, a, 1985:145].

This attack on foreign business was unleashed in the PSC's dissolution manifesto, printed just four months after the foundation of a party that had encountered fierce opposition from the ruling classes. Although the PSC swiftly disappeared, preoccupation with the mighty tobacco trusts had become widespread in both the city and province of Havana, in particular, where much of the tobacco industry was centred. At this time, two thirds of tobacco factories were owned by foreign trusts:

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[29] Diego Vicente Tejera (1848-1903) was a Cuban socialist who spent the majority of his adult life in Europe, where he studied politics, and the USA, where he promoted the Cuban Independence.
[30] For example, the Peruvian Manuel González Prada (1844-1918).

the Henry Clay Company, also known as "la compañía inglesa" (*the English company*), and the Havana Commercial Company, alias "el trust americano" (*the American trust)* controlled the bulk of the market, while the balance remained under independent ownership. Meanwhile, foreign capital also found its way into rural areas. Sugar plantations, particularly in the east of the island, were mostly bought up by large US corporations, such as the United Fruit Company.

The domination of large businesses, the interference in Cuban affairs by the USA and the displacement of Cuban by Spanish workers fomented nationalism among some tobacco workers, a group with a relatively long tradition of organisation. The LGTC, a union that aimed to represented workers of varying trades in Cuba, was formed at a time when the notion of a wholly *Cuban* politics was still vague, has been described by Del Toro as possessing a "nacionalismo revolucionario"[31] (*revolutionary nationalism*) [Del Toro, 1969:65], although, in truth, the pull towards nationalism among LGTC members was much stronger than the use of revolutionary tactics. It was precisely the LGTC's reluctance to support direct action and its condemnation of strikes, in particular, that almost crippled it shortly after its foundation. This is best illustrated by its refusal to back a six-week strike declared by some 1,500 construction workers in Havana during the summer of 1899. Represented by the Gremio de Albañiles y Ayudantes (*Builders' Union*), these workers were appalled at their harsh and dangerous conditions and long hours. They called for better working conditions and exercised the common and widespread anarcho-syndicalist demand for the eight-hour working day through a strike that attracted native and immigrant, black and white workers and that swiftly gained the support of those in other trades, such as bakers, tram, rail and tobacco workers [Meitín, 1975:91].

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[31] Although the union proclaimed support of all workers it emphasised its Cubanness by its very name (Cuban Workers as opposed to workers of Cuba).

The strike, which gradually spread from the city into the province of Havana, was influenced by anarchists, individuals who were, according to William Ludlow, the Military Governor of Havana at that time, "enemigos de la sociedad (los) que enarbolan la bandera roja de la anarquía, violando las leyes y los derechos ajenos" (*enemies of society [those] who embrace the red flag of anarchy, violating laws and the rights of others*) [IMHCRSC 1, 1985: 173]. That condemnation helped to justify the eventual imprisonment of strike leaders and the deployment of US Marines at ports. The LGTC refused to support a strike that could be a breeding ground for anarchism: "¡Abajo la huelga que trae grandes disturbios! ¡Viva la independencia de Cuba! (*Down with the strike that brings great disturbances! Long live independence!*) [Aguirre, 1965:86]. The fact that the strike had attracted Spanish workers was probably worrying to an organisation that aimed not to unify foreign and native workers, but to lessen Spanish worker privileges. Far from supporting the popular action, the LGTC's president, Enrique Messonier,[32] was accused of conspiring in its collapse with Ludlow and Rafael de Cárdenas, the chief of police who was ultimately responsible for repressing strikers. The US administration and company bosses welcomed any division in the labour movement that hindered worker solidarity, and the LGTC was accused by anarchist groups of socialism, nationalism and chauvinism [Tellería Toca in *Granma*, 12/09/1972:2]. The LGTC denied that it had acted as a barrier to international worker solidarity, insisting that it aspired to unity, harmony and peace but that it would no longer tolerate the exclusivist nature of employment in the tobacco factories.

However, failure to support the striking workers, regardless of nationality, led to the temporary downfall of the LGTC. In a matter of weeks, membership dwindled from

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[32] Enrique Messonier, a Cuban worker leader and one-time anarchist and secretary of the tobacco workers' union, collaborated in the periodicals *El Obrero* and *El Productor*. He was also co-founder and secretary of the Círculo de Trabajadores. He fought in the War of Independence and, after the collapse of the LGTC, became active in bourgeois politics.

10,000 to just 300 [Ayon, 1972: 97], suggesting that the workers were more passionate about bread-and-butter issues, achievable through solidarity, than about the politics of nationalism. For their part, the construction workers gained a rise in wages and the right to work an eight-hour day in the aftermath of the suppressed strike.

The LGTC needed to recover support lost during the construction workers' strike and that opportunity came when the Platt Amendment was incorporated into the Cuban constitution, a move that many saw as a threat to national sovereignty. US interference in Cuban politics caused discontent as "el país entero entró en un período de agitación extraordinaria. Las manifestaciones se sucedían unas a otras en todos los pueblos en son de protesta" (*the whole country entered into a period of extraordinary agitation. Demonstrations sprang up in all towns in a wave of protest*) [Ibarra, 1992:7]. The LGTC now played the anti-imperialist card, one close to the heart of many workers in Cuba. In March 1902, *¡Alerta*! (*Watch Out!*), the LGTC's mouthpiece published "Salvemos la República" *(Let us Save the Republic!*), which condemned the relationship between bourgeois politicians and the USA:

> El pueblo cubano, que no debe nada al dominador intruso que con sofística falacia intenta uncirnos al carro de su ambición cesarista; el pueblo cubano que quiere ser libre, porque para serlo dió a la patria todo su contingente de carne y oro y lágrimas y sufrimientos; el pueblo cubano no acepta la obra de esos traidores a la revoución que se disponen a entregar la patria a nueva esclavitud (*The Cuban people, who owe nothing to the intrusive power that through fallacy tries to tie us to its Caesarist ambition; the Cuban people, who want to be free, because being so gives all their flesh, gold, tears and suffering to the native land; the Cuban people do not accept the work of those traitors to the revolution who are prepared to deliver the native land to a new slavery*) [IHMCRSC,b, 1985:184].

The growing political and economic influence of the USA in Cuba, coupled with the readiness of Cuban politicians to accept such domination, angered workers, helping the LGTC to regain strength and, in 1902, the organisation added its force to strikes

in the tobacco industry. A strike called at the Cabañas cigar factory, belonging to the "American trust", was not initially concerned with the discrimination experienced by native workers. Instead workers demanded that a higher quality raw material be available to cigar rollers, as a low-grade leaf resulted in low wages. As the strike, which became known as the "Huelga de los Aprendices" (*Apprentices' Strike*), spread to other factories, the LGTC, through *¡Alerta!*, was swift to call other workers to the conflict and to produce a list of demands directed at the Trust. The Trust Strike Committee curiously failed to mention the quality of tobacco leaf but it did demand that tobacco rolling apprenticeships be restricted to 5 per cent of the total workforce.[33] The committee also called for seniority rights, price control, union recognition and workers' rights:

> ¡A la huelga, a la huelga todo el pueblo cubano, si es preciso, para que nuestros hijos obtengan el derecho de ganar su pan en el trabajo, que extranjeros perniciosos les niegan en el propio país de su nacimiento! (*Strike now! The whole population of Cuba, if it is necessary, so that our sons obtain the right to earn their bread through the work that pernicious foreigners deny them in their own native land*!) [*¡Alerta!*, 09/11/1902, supplement].

The call to action reads as a double attack on foreign business and on Spanish workers, both seen as responsible for the displacement of Cubans. Enthusiasm on the part of the LGTC, financial support from Cuban workers still employed in Tampa and Key West, and the fact that the Strike Committee's demands were rejected by the Trust, all helped to promote the strike to areas outside the city while, within Havana itself, it was no longer confined to the tobacco industry. In the city, stevedores, sanitary workers and butchers, among others, all refused to work until demands were met. Perhaps more significantly, the strike triggered worker action at sugar plantations in the central province of Las Villas.

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[33] It was feared that an abundance of skilled workers would result in employer exploitation.

Worker organisation within a sugar industry recently released from slavery was nascent during the early Republic but, in November 1902, workers in the town of Cruces in Las Villas exploded into direct action. Unlike those employed in the tobacco industry, sugar workers were not concerned with discriminatory tactics, as racial and international solidarity existed in that historically mixed-race industry. With no mention of nationalism, workers in Cruces called for better pay and conditions and a shorter working day, with some condemning the divisive approach of the LGTC in Havana. In a letter published in the prominent and long-running anarchist periodical *¡Tierra!*, [34] José García[35] accused the organisation of being a continuation of the nineteenth-century reformist and strike-breaking Unión Obrera, alleging that members of the LGTC aspired not to the needs of all workers but only their own. Unlike those individuals, he remarked, sugar workers pursued the dream of liberty for all "siendo nuestro único grito de guerra la emancipación de todos los esclavos, la desaparación de todos los privilegios" (*our only war cry being the emancipation of all slaves, the disappearance of all privileges*) [IHMCRSC, a, 1985:200]. Sugar workers did, however, resent the imposition of foreign employers and it was intended that the strike spread to other plantations in the area. According to contemporary reports, workers stormed neighbouring plantations, instilling fear into other employees and driving them to participate:

> Numerosos obreros con banderas rojas recorren las calles paralizando el trabajo en el pueblo ..... La huelga general continúa con mayor incremento y más ardor por parte de los huelguistas. Se teme fundamentalmente por la alteración del orden público y la policía no permite reunión de grupos en las calles (*Numerous workers with red flags roam the streets paralysing work in the town... the general strike continues more quickly and with more ardour on the part of the strikers. One fears fundamentally for a breach of the peace, and the police are not allowing group meetings in the streets*) [*La Lucha*, 27/11/02:1].

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[34] *¡Tierra!* was published between 1902 and 1914 and re-emerged in 1924/5 after being suppressed by the authorities.
[35] García was a Spanish anarchist and worker leader among sugar workers in the Cruces region.

The reactionary press[36] labelled the instigators of the strike bandits, trouble-makers and even agents of the Spanish government. Bowing to pressure from US sugar magnates, the US Ambassador to Cuba, Herbert G. Squiers, wrote to President Estrada Palma, demanding that US sugar interests be protected and he, in turn, addressed an urgent telegram to the Governor of the Province of Las Villas, José Miguel Gómez[37] "para que reprimiera con mano dura a los trabajadores azucareros de Cruces" (*that the sugar workers of Cruces be severely repressed*) [Padrón: 19/11/1969:2]. Fearing US intervention at a time when the Platt Amendment had only very recently replaced US occupation, the sugar strikes in Las Villas were brutally repressed by the Rural Guard, during which the workers Joaquín Casañas and Amado Montero were killed, an act known by workers thereafter as "el crimen de Cruces" (*The crime of Cruces*) [*¡Tierra!* 19/09/1903:1].

Likewise, in Havana, the "Huelga de los Aprendices" ended in bloody repression. Cuban anxiety about adherence to article 3 of the Platt Amendment appears to have been decisive in the collapse of the strike, as Squiers informed Washington in its aftermath:

> This Government by its prompt action discouraged a great strike, one which, if allowed to reach a certain point, would have spread over the island and might have terminated in such a state of disorder as to bring the United States face to face again with the question of intervention .... Probably this fear induced the Cuban Government to act more promptly and vigorously than it would otherwise have done [Pérez, 1986:53].

Thus, the strike was extinguished and, though an agreement was reached that should have admitted Cuban apprentices into all sectors of the tobacco industry, the recommendation was completely disregarded by tobacco trusts and such concessions were not realised until the 1930s.

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[36] *Diario de la Marina* was accused of being "anti-obrero" (*anti-worker*), for example [*Rebelión,* 04/03/1909:2].
[37] José Miguel Gómez (1858-1921). President of Cuba from 1909-1913.

The suspicion that unrest in the country would spur the US administration to honour the Platt Amendment was not unfounded, although the eventual reason for occupation lay not with labour troubles but political ones. In 1906, Estrada Palma was re-elected President, causing the newly formed Liberal Party to rise up in protest at fraudulent elections, provoking "a civil war between the Liberal and Conservative parties" [Shaffer, 1998:19] The British Foreign Office's 1906 annual commercial report captured the mood:

> The wanton destruction caused to property by the insurgence (of the August 1906 uprising) and the petty thievery committed by them have created a feeling of insecurity throughout the country..... There is great stagnation in business, accounts are hard to collect and a want of confidence is the prevailing feature in all branches of trade [FO/98]

The political unrest forced Estrada Palma to resign and the USA to install a provisional Governor, Charles E Magoon, in his place, and it was during this second US occupation[38] that the second major labour strike of the new Republic occurred. The Huelga de la Moneda (*Currency Strike*) was initiated by tobacco workers who demanded that, as no national currency yet existed, wages be paid in US dollars, a change that would be equivalent to a 10% wage increase[39]. Those employed in tobacco factories belonging to the trusts declared strike action in February 1907, while, according to Foreign Office reports, workers in independent tobacco factories contributed up to 40% of their own wages to those on strike. As worker forged solidarity with worker, so did the employers support each other, independent factory bosses declaring a lock-out at the end of April. The tobacco industry was at a standstill.

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[38] The occupation lasted until 1909.

[39] Workers were still paid in Spanish currency, or more puzzlingly, French Louis.

Governor Magoon, aware that workers were also consumers and that payment in US dollars could only benefit US business, appeared to favour the strikers' motives:

> The workmen desire to be paid in American money; not because that currency is American, but because it is stable... ... Any country afflicted by an unstable currency ought to take steps to secure a stable currency [FO 277/147:55].[40]

The strikers celebrated success in July 1907, an event that sparked similar action in Havana among those employed in other sectors, notably those in the building trade and rail workers.[41] Construction workers, supported by *¡Tierra!,* which favoured the anti-government attitude displayed by strikers in clashes with the authorities, were successful in their demands for higher wages and, although their working day was not lowered to eight hours, as hoped, they did manage to secure a nine-hour day, as opposed to the ten that many had been working [*¡Tierra!*, 21/12/07:3]. Meanwhile, rail workers were accused by managers of many counts of sabotage, including stoning trains, greasing rails, changing sidings and threatening non-striking drivers. The company owners blamed the strike committee[42] for encouraging such action and some 200 workers were detained, soon to be freed or else fined, a penalty that other workers helped finance.

The strike continued while two British train companies recruited strike-breakers from the USA, probably hoping to divide workers along lines of nationality. As the strike extended to Santa Clara, fears that a general strike was imminent began to spread:

> There have been some cases of stone throwing and it is alleged that an attempt was recently made to blow up an engine of a train running from the

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[40] According to a British Foreign Office report, the cigar workers held a demonstration in honour of Magoon [FO227/147:59]

[41] Other workers who declared strikes at this time included box makers, plumbers, carpenters and street cleaners.

[42] It is more likely that they were isolated acts of individual terrorism or, wishing to discredit the union, the work of the companies themselves. The train workers' union, the Ferrocarriles Unidos, was reformist and did not adhere to violent direct action.

> Capital to Santiago de Cuba ..... There are rumours that the railway strike is only a preliminary to greater evils and that the island is on the eve of a general strike [FO 227/147:85].

Despite attempts by workers to scupper the arrival of the strike-breakers and although their employment contravened General Wood's 1902 military order, which prohibited the importation of foreign labourers under contract [FO 277/147:85], the imported labour was welcomed by authorities and that action helped to destroy the rail workers' strike. Maybe the British train companies and government would not enjoy the same benefits as the US tobacco trusts and government should their employees be paid in US currency. Maybe the US authorities allowed the strike-breakers easy access to Cuban soil because it would ease some of the labour-related problems at home, and at the very least it would have helped to hinder US-Cuban worker solidarity. In any case, the rail workers' demands were not met. What is certain is that the apparently successful (earlier) Huelga de la Moneda was unpopular among writers of *¡Tierra!*. The strike was "pacífica, ordenada y sumisa" (*peaceful, orderly and submissive*) the periodical maintained [*¡Tierra!* 23/03/1907:2] and the strikers' demands were limited. The strike had been a triumph for the factory owners and not the strikers, it pointed out [*¡Tierra!* 27/07/1907:3].

During the 1906-1909 US occupation, large labour disputes were mostly confined to urban areas, although anarchists in the *campo* continued to champion their cause. Abelerdo Saavedra (see below) and Juan Aller[43] toured the island "en excursión de propaganda libertaria" (*on an excursion of libertarian propaganda*) [*La Voz del Dependiente*, 16/06/1908:3]. The Cuban Government preferred to be seen to be making some concessions to workers and, during the period immediately following the occupation, President José Miguel Gómez, ushered in two new labour laws. The

[43] Aller had been one of those worker leaders arrested in the 1899 construction workers' strike.

Ley de Arteaga[44] banned the payment of wages in coupons, a practice that until 1909 had remained especially common on sugar plantations. The coupons had then been traded in exclusively for products at the company store, sold at inflated prices, beneficial to the companies and detrimental to the workers. Another law, the Ley del Cierre (*Closure Law*) should have obliged most commercial establishments to close at six o'clock in the evening, allowing service industry workers more free time.[45]

One of the biggest labour upsets of Gómez's relatively progressive administration was the Huelga del Alcantarrillado (*Sewerage Strike)* of 1911, which is remarkable for the rare organisational role of the newly formed Agrupación Socialista de la Habana (*Socialist Association of Havana*). The strike was launched after two sewer workers died as a result of dangerous working conditions, when some 1,500 workers demanded safer and more sanitary conditions, an eight-hour work day, a rise in wages and payment in US dollars. The strike once again dispels the myth, often upheld by Cuban labour historians, that socialists in Cuba tended to be Cuban, while anarchists were Spanish troublemakers. It is estimated that 75% of sewer workers in Havana, and so strikers, were Spanish,[46] although, according to Del Toro, the Huelga del Alcantarrillado was also the first instance of Marxist influence among Cuban workers [Del Toro, 1969:72]. The two-month strike ultimately failed due to heavy repression and expulsions by the Government, the use of strike-breakers and, once again, divisions among the workforce along nationalist lines, (the strike-breakers being recruited among the Cuban unemployed), while socialist organisers of the strike were accused by anarchists of possessing a lack of revolutionary fibre.[47]

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[44] Named after Liberal Party representative Emilio Arteaga, who proposed the bill.
[45] The Ley del Cierre , however, was rarely adhered to. See Chapter 2 for more details on service industry workers.
[46] Cabrera maintains that the majority of the exploited were from Galicia [Cabrera, 1985:128].
[47] See Chapter 2 for more information on anarchist reaction to this strike.

In rural Cuba, meanwhile, unrest was centred not on the issue of nationality but on race. A political party set up in 1908 by a group of Afro-Cuban veterans of the War of Independence, the Partido Independiente de Color [PIC] (*Independent Party of Colour*), prompted the government to introduce a new bill, known as the Morúa bill. Named after its proponent, the Afro-Cuban Liberal leader of the Senate, Martín Morúa Delgado, the bill stated that any party founded on the basis of race or colour would be illegal. Although the PIC insisted that it represented all races and nationalities,[48] the name inspired suspicions of a racially separate political entity, that is black versus white, and white men still constituted the Cuban government. The party did not dissolve, however.

By 1912, the black population of Cuba had expanded to include workers born outside of the country. When the United Fruit Company managed to legally contravene the 1903 Commercial Reciprocity Treaty, which prohibited the importation of labour from the neighbouring Caribbean countries, it opened the floodgates for (predominantly) Jamaican and Haitian labourers, shipped to Cuba to narrow the alleged labour shortfall on the sugar plantations. In 1913, United Fruit obtained a presidential decree authorising the importation of 1,000 Jamaican and Haitian labourers [De la Fuente, 1997: 34]. Thereafter, there was an influx of sugar labourers, displacing thousands of Cuban workers who, unlike their Jamaican and Haitian counterparts, did not accept the already outlawed coupon system and, furthermore, the new arrivals often accepted lower wages than those demanded by native workers. It has been estimated that around 2,000 West Indian immigrants legally entered Cuba during 1912 although, as Pérez pointed out, the true volume of workers arriving from those countries was not known, as many entered without permission and "illegal immigrants usually remained in Cuba permanently" [Pérez, 1986:524]. According to

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[48] Among their demands were representation by blacks in the military and government, the generically sought eight-hour day and free immigration for all. See De la Fuente [1999:64] for more information.

official figures, around 9,445 West Indians entered Cuba from 1909 to 1913, as compared to 28,900 in the next quadrennial,[49] most finding employment on the sugar plantations in the east of Cuba. The result was, as early as 1912, the displacement of many Cubans from their place of work, which led to a sense of unease as the reality of underemployment and poverty began to set in.

As it was concerned with political rather than social issues, the PIC did not enjoy the solid backing of many Afro-Cubans, neither of peasants, workers nor farmers [De la Fuente, 1993:66]. However, when the leaders of the PIC instigated a violent protest[50] in May, 1912, thousands of malcontents in Oriente joined its ranks:[51]

> Political grievances ignited social protest. They were not unrelated, but they were separate. Afro-Cuban politicians demanded a place in the republic, and mobility. Afro-Cuban peasants demanded a place on the land, and permanence [Pérez, 1986:531].

The revolt, which saw the burning of sugar plantations, in particular, was labelled racist by the government, and the US administration urged the Cuban government to repress the uprising before it spread to other parts of the country. By the end of May, the US had already deployed 750 Marines at its Guantánamo base and threatened to send more troops to protect US interests in the eastern region [FO 371/1359:23]. In fact, the British Foreign Office conceded that US occupation was precisely what the insurgents sought:

> There was ..... really no race feeling in Cuba. The present troubles were probably fomented for political reasons and helped and hurried on by those who desire annexation to the United States, and it will take years to establish confidence between the two races at any rate in the Province of Santiago [FO 371/1359:33].

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[49] It has been estimated that around 300, 000 West Indians entered Cuba in search of work between 1917 and 1930, [De la Fuente, 1997:34]. For fuller immigration figures, see appendix.
[50] Helg maintains that the uprising was a protest rather than a rebellion [Helg, 2000: 262]
[51] Pérez puts the number of participants at 10,000 [1986:536].

The protest, it was hoped, would help to overthrow the Gómez administration, which was adamant that the Morúa law be upheld [Pérez, 1986: 531]. However, it was brutally repressed by the military[52] and up to six thousand were ruthlessly killed, according to a report by Leech of the British Consulate:

> The casualties reported are, I fear, as often as not among innocent and pacific Negroes who have the misfortune to reside in the area [FO 371/1359:29].

The leaders of the revolt were killed or imprisoned and many others, including innocent victims, perished. The Government had deterred further occupation by the US and had quelled racial unrest.

Elsewhere in the *campo*, the Republic's first national anarchist congress was held in February 1912, at the Centro Obrero (*Worker Centre*) in the sugar-producing region of Cruces. A small affair, the Congress aimed to work towards setting up a Federación de Trabajadores de Cuba (*Workers Federation of Cuba*), an entity that would embrace all workers in the country, although that dream would not be realised until the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba (*National Federation of the Workers of Cuba*) was set up in 1925. The 22 delegates present agreed that there was a need to improve hygiene and safety at work and home, to set up rationalist schools and, of course, to ensure that no worker exceed an eight-hour working day.

Since the unrest of 1902, Cruces had been a hotbed of anarchist organisation. The two men killed by the Rural Guard in those disturbances were seen as martyrs by fellow workers:

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[52] According to Helg, white Cubans formed militias all over the country, ready to quell the PIC protest, while large numbers of *peninsulares* offered their services voluntarily [Helg, 2000: 276].

> En el pedazo de tierra en que se exteriorizaron un día los anhelos rebeldes de nuestros inolvidables compañeros Casañas y Montero, no se ha agotado la semilla del ideal, antes por el contrario, ha fructificado con exhuberante lozanía [*In the patch of earth where, one day, our unforgettable comrades, Casañas and Montero, displayed their rebellious yearnings, the seed of idealism has not exhausted itself, but has flourished with exuberant vigour* [*Rebelión*, 16/07/1909:1].

In 1911, when the well-known anarchist Abelardo Saavedra was expelled from Cuba for inciting violence through anarchist meetings and propaganda tours, both R*ebelión* (from 1910, published in Cruces) and *¡Tierra!* were vociferous in their condemnation of the authorities. Meetings were held all over the island to protest against the expulsion of the cobbler who had organised the Centro Obrero in Cruces and who had been editor of *¡Tierra!* and *Rebelión*. Felipe Zapata[53] honoured him as "la figura anarquista más atrayente y respetable que se conocía en Cuba" (*the most attractive and respectable anarchist known in Cuba*) [*Unidad Gastronómica,* a:33].

Saavedra quickly and clandestinely returned to Cuba and, along with fellow deportee Juan Tur, once again picked up the anarchist banner in the Cuban countryside. The Manifiesto de Cruces [*Cruces' Manifesto*], initially published in *Rebelión* and then circulated in the *campo* at the beginning of 1915, urged workers to fight against the injustices of capitalism and to demand the much-touted eight-hour day and a 25% rise in wages:

> Nuestra mansedumbre y el acatamiento a las decisiones de los capitalistas, nos ha creado una situación, así económica como social, que nuestra dignidad de hombres y el indiscutible derecho que tenemos al íntegro desenvolvimiento de la vida, nos impelen a rebelarnos contra los que no reconociéndonos necesidades que satisfacer y consideración y respeto de que gozar, nos utilizan como a irracionales bestias y nos tratan como a viles esclavos, indignos de vivir (*Our meekness and deference to the decisions of the capitalists have created for us a situation both economic and social, that our dignity and the indisputable right that we have to our development as human beings, drives us to rebel against those who, not granting us necessities and the consideration and respect we deserve, use us like*

[53] See chapter 3 for more on Felipe Zapata.

> *unthinking beasts and treat us like low slaves, unworthy of life*) [IHMCRSC, b, 1985: 321].

Screaming "la lucha destruirá, creará y perfeccionará" (*the struggle will destroy, create and perfect*), the Manifesto provided the authorities with the perfect justification for a total clampdown on anarchist activity in Cuba, and particularly in the countryside. Prominent figures in the workers' movement were expelled, including Saavedra, worker centres were shut down and *¡Tierra!* was suppressed (it did not reappear until 1924, when worker unrest was rekindled in rural areas).

With the onset of war in Europe, workers in Cuba had begun to protest against the atrocities being committed across the Atlantic and numerous meetings were held in 1914, from Havana to Cruces to Cienfuegos and Ciego de Ávila [*¡Tierra!*, 01/10/1914:3]. The service industry workers' publication *El Dependiente*, which escaped the fate of *¡Tierra!*, was especially vocal in the condemnation of the war (see Chapter 2).

The Government had attempted to appease worker discontent when it financed a well-attended national worker congress in Havana in late August 1914. Being funded by the state, the congress was reformist in nature, and a range of subjects were discussed, including housing, night work, the protection of women and child workers, immigration, apprenticeships, pensions, schools, hygiene and wages. The congress also proposed that a Partido Democrático Social (*Social Democratic Party*) be formed, but this was never realised due to the upheaval caused by the Great War and the lack of interest shown by workers [Córdova, 1997:113]. Although the three-day event attracted some 1,400 workers from all corners of Cuba, anarchists believed it to be a non-event that pandered only to employers and the state:

> ¡Ah! Ese Congreso Nacional Borrego es un gancho, un admirable gancho polítco-burgúes para atrapar obreros incautos .... no es económica-social, sino principalmente política (*Ah! That Hoax National Congress is a hook, an admirable political-bourgeois hook to pull in gullible workers ... it is not socio-economic, but principally political* [*¡Tierra*!, 6/8/1914: 1].

However, such journalistic outbursts were soon quelled by the state and 1915 to 1916 was, apart from renewed but separate strikes by construction and rail workers for higher wages and an eight-hour day, a relatively quiet period for the Cuban labour movement.

The Building of Unions, Federations and Confederations

In April 1917, Cuba followed the lead of the United States of America in declaring the country's allegiance to allied forces in the First World War, an act that, according to Stephen Leech of the British Consulate in Havana, was merely representative of the political bond that existed between the neighbouring countries [FO 371/3198:58603]. This was an opinion that Leech reinforced towards the end of the war, in October 1918, when he stated that "Cuba entered the war as a result of her circumstances rather than by inclination and ... her heart was not in it" [FO 371/3195: 51]. In fact, although Cuba imposed obligatory military service in August 1918 [*New York Times*: 02/08/1918] and offered home-grown troops to bolster US forces, no military cadre ever left Cuban shores. The US administration thanked Cuba for its support but regretted that Cuban troops would be impossible to transport [*Havana Post*, 10/10/1918:2].

At this time, the United States appears to have been more concerned with positioning its own Marines on Cuban soil in an attempt to uphold its blossoming political and, perhaps more importantly, economic relationship with Cuba. In 1917, the US Marine Corps deployed troops in Camagüey and Oriente provinces partly in response to a

Liberal uprising, which had taken place in the face of alleged election fraud, in the midst of strikes by workers on the sugar plantations (see below). Pérez has pointed out that the Platt Amendment could evoke military intervention during times of both political and social uncertainty:

> The analogy between strikes and rebellion, particularly as they both adversely affected property, and thereby passing properly under the requirements of treaty obligations, soon became a fixed feature in the application of the Platt Amendment [Pérez, 1986:57].

In Guantánamo alone, approximately a thousand Marines helped guard the eastern regions, an act that "has already inspired confidence among sugar planters and mill owners in Oriente Province" [FO 371/2923:59]. The US supported the bid for re-election sought by General Menocal, the conservative leader who had sworn solidarity with the allies and whose presidency had seen a surge in economic investment by US companies, an influx of capital that was particularly manifest at sugar mills in the east of Cuba.

The international growth in the demand for sugar spurred US companies to invest heavily in production, a venture that had begun before the onset of war. Albert has pointed out that in South America, the First World War did not create new circumstances in the region but merely acted as a catalyst for those factors already in existence [Albert, 1988:5]. This observation was true of US investment in Cuba that, although evident before the war, nonetheless accelerated during the conflict. Direct US investment in Cuba had increased more than four-fold between 1896 and 1914, growing from $US 50 million to $US 215 million in that time period [O'Brien, 1996:208]. Thus the wheels of US industry in Cuba were already set in motion during the first decade of the twentieth century, although as O'Brien has noted: "If the increase in American investment down to World War I had been impressive, its development in the following decades was nothing less than spectacular" [O'Brien,

1996: 210]. By 1924, the amount of investment had rocketed to $US 1.3 billion, much of that capital entering sugar production, mining, power and telecommunications, in particular. In the east of Cuba, US corporations ploughed capital into creating immense sugar estates that, in terms of modernity, would outshine those smaller and mostly Cuban or Spanish mills in the west.

The financial influx into Cuban sugar production would foment the country's reliance on sugar, consolidating its position as a monocultural producer. During and since colonialism, sugar had been the mainstay of economic growth in Cuba and the onset of war in Europe led to increased demand for the product world-wide, especially in those Allied countries that, boasting little or no domestic production, relied on sugar imports. Some 75% of sugar consumed in Britain had been imported from German and Austro-Hungarian beet crops prior to the war [Albert, 1988:55], a source that could no longer be tapped from August 1914. During the war, the world production of sugar beet dwindled, hitting an all time low in 1919,[54] while sugar cane levelled off at around 11 million tons during the same period [Thomas, 1998:1577]. While the output of Cuban sugar cane rose steadily during and immediately after the war years, as a percentage of total world production its growth was impressive indeed, rising from 10.5% in 1913, to 18.1% in 1917 to 26.37% in 1919 [Thomas, 1998:1577]. Wealth accumulated by the owners of sugar plantations and mills was formidable, the total value of production reaching almost $US 1 billion in 1920 but falling to nearly a quarter of that amount in the following year.[55]

Thus the market for Cuban sugar grew during the international conflict. Whereas only 10% had been exported to Europe in 1913, by June 1916 that figured had

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[54] In 1913, beet production was at 9,054,000 tons, gradually falling to 3,350,000 tons in 1919 [Thomas, 1998:1577]. Production recovered during the 1920s.
[55] The total value of Cuba's sugar production in 1920 was $999,897,458 and just £273, 197, 276 in 1921 [Ibarra, 1998: 442].

increased to 39% [Dumoulin, 1980: 22]. This growth in business benefited mill owners but little of the rewards were passed onto the workforce, US companies even preferring to ship cane across the Florida Strait to be refined in their own mills [Dumoulin, 1980:22], thus denying employment to the workforce in Cuba. Regardless of this, unemployment does not appear to have been a problem in wartime Cuba. On the contrary, the British Consul in Havana reported in July 1917 that labour was "scarce" and that it was becoming essential to import workers from other countries, preferably China, as was happening in parts of the West Indies [FO, 371/2923:36]. In fact, according to Cuban statistics, only 10,378 Chinese entered Cuba from 1919 to 1923,[56] compared with 136,987 workers from the Jamaica and Haiti during the same period [Ibarra, 1992: 452]. It was also reported that "wages are enormous" [FO 371/2923:39], although it appears that, if wages were high, the cost of living was much higher. Pitting the salary of a cane-cutter against the cost of basic foodstuffs, Ibarra found that between 1917 and 1919 many families could barely afford to eat, real wages having decreased in the year 1917-1918 to 66% of their 1912 value and to 80% in 1918-1919 [Ibarra, 1992: 455]. Although the situation was not as drastic in urban areas, where average nominal wages never appeared to have gone below the cost of feeding a family of four, those workers nevertheless experienced a hefty fall in the value of real wages after 1914[57] [Ibarra, 1992: 457]. For its part, the government attempted to curb the ever-increasing prices:

> In order to meet the serious situation arising from the highly increased cost of living, especially of the necessaries of life, a decree was issued on 24th April (1917) fixing maximum prices of bread, jerked beef, alcohol, olive oil, meat, fish, rice, beans, charcoal, with the power to extend or modify the list when considered desirable [FO 371/2923: 31].

If the decree were breached, the penalty would be imprisonment or the imposition of a fine. The high cost of living was due to the lack of domestic production and the

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[56] No similar figures for Chinese immigration are available for 1917.
[57] For more information on urban wages, see Chapter 3.

reliance on imports available at inflated prices due to scarcity, as elsewhere in Latin America [Albert, 1988: 59]. Certainly Cuba had not built a successful import substitution industry and, by 1917, the prices of imports were abnormally high:

> In considering prices here it is necessary to remember that Cuba produces practically nothing herself and that nearly everything is imported from the US and has to pay customs duty on entry (in some cases of 40% ad valorem) ... a further artificial increase is imposed by retailers of all kinds [FO 371/2923: 63].

The situation in Cuba was serious indeed, as even staple foods, such as wheat flour for bread, were imported from the USA, whose Food Administration and War Trade Board stipulated that, unless a maximum price for Cuban sugar was levied, the supply of coal and wheat to Cuba would be halted, an ultimatum to which the Cuban government eventually surrendered [Thomas, 1998: 531/2]. A Cuban Food Administration Board (FAB), based on the US model, was established in an attempt to control supply and to appease growing discontent in Cuba. In September 1918, the head of the Cuban FAB wrote to the then head of the US Board and future President of the United States of America, Herbert Hoover, asking him "to hasten the shipment of wheat flour for fear of bread riots" [*The Havana Post*, 21/09/1918:6]. The FAB did not prove popular and its directors were accused (by many periodicals except ultra-conservative ones) of "amassing fabulous fortunes for themselves at the expense of the people", while providing "a very fertile soil for the sowing of all kinds of revolutionary propaganda, and anti-government politicians and Spanish anarchists of whom there are believed to be many in Cuba, (who) have not failed to use the opportunity offered" [FO 371/3705:2].

Those accused of being Spanish anarchists were harshly dealt with and, in July and August 1919 alone, one hundred Spanish worker leaders were expelled from the island [Palaez Groba, 1991:8489]. This treatment was also meted out to Germans

living in Cuba and, in one paranoid drive, 30 of these "enemy aliens" were deported [*New York Times*, 04/09/1919: 2]. Germans and "German sympathisers" were accused of promoting rail strikes, while Spanish inhabitants were seen to be indifferent to the war effort or else "pro-German" [FO 371/2661:10]. 70% of Cubans, on the other hand, had supported the Allies (according to the British Consul in July 1916) eight months before the Cuban government declared war alongside the United States of America [FO 371/2661:10].

If the government was suspicious that German propaganda was being unleashed on Cuba's inhabitants, those inhabitants felt a more immediate threat in the increased attention from US economic interests, strengthened by the positioning of Marines, poised to intervene if necessary. The British Consul was aware of the hostility that was spreading among all classes of Cubans and Spanish:

> Generally speaking, there is a strong anti-American feeling in Cuba. This is due largely to the irritation caused by the contact of races, dissimilar mode of like, etc., partly to the envy of Cubans who are jealous of American penetration of the island and also to an inherent feeling of hostility among the Spaniards as a result of American intervention on behalf of Cuban liberty, all of which has been fostered by a strong local German element which exerts considerable influence [FO 371/3195: 98/80].

According to the above view, Spanish inhabitants in Cuba still harboured a mistrust of the USA, due to the defeat of Spain in the "Spanish-American War" some twenty years earlier. It is just as likely, however, that this mistrust had its origins in the usurpation of Spanish economic interests by American ones. It is also likely that the roots of the anti-Americanism displayed by Cubans lay not simply in envy but also in the creeping displacement of workers by US management policies[58] and especially

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[58] Rationalisation in the workplace was still in its infancy at the end of the First World War. Rationalised working patterns expanded throughout the 1920s, as more US capital penetrated the sugar industry, in particular. As noted, mills in the west of Cuba were less modernised than those in the east and Dumoulin has suggested that workers in the west, who were still employed by Spanish or Cuban bosses, worked harder in a bid to resist being taken over by huge US companies and also in competition to them [Dumoulin, 1980: 58].

during the cycles of US occupation. Furthermore, in Oriente Province these sentiments had been exacerbated by confusion surrounding the Liberal uprising in early 1917. Although the US administration had backed Menocal (the devil they knew), one US naval commander in Santiago had been persuaded by a Liberal colonel, Fernández, to deny entry to Menocal's fleet, which was responding to the uprising. This single action, according to the British Consul had caused widespread hostility, directed against the US:

> (The) general feeling of the people of Oriente Province is now very anti-American and they assert that the United States have not kept their word and that rebels were practically recognised by the US commander at Santiago [FO 371/2923: 89].

The effects of war-time prices, the growth of US corporations and the foreign military presence in Cuba soon led many workers to voice their anger at increasing hardship and subordination. Between the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1920, 220 strikes were declared on Cuban soil [Córdova, 1997:122]. The largest strikes, and those that were capable of causing the most damage to the economy, were staged by sugar and transport workers (see below).

By 1917 urban workers in many trades had already secured the eight-hour working day, a right that had not yet been extended to rural areas and so was not enjoyed by the thousands of sugar workers on the island, many of whom were still expected to put in twelve hours in a day [Dumoulin, 1980:56]. Thus a reduction of working hours, along with a rise in wages and union recognition, was one of the demands sought by striking sugar workers in the region of Cienfuegos in the western area of Santa Clara, during October and November 1917.

The strike took hold around Cienfuegos for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the town of Cruces, some 35 kilometres north east of the city boasted such a large concentration

of sugar mills that the workers there had become partly urbanised. Close contact with one another strengthened unity, allowing workers to exchange information and to organise more easily. Secondly, a strong union movement already existed in Cienfuegos. Inspired by the transport (predominantly dock workers') union, the Federación Obrera de Bahía (FOB), which became known as the Federación Terrestre (FT), was set up, attracting many skilled workers in the city, notably mechanics, machinists, iron workers, carpenters, builders and coppersmiths. It was precisely that body of workers, headed by the reformist Vicente Martínez,[59] that extended its influence to the surrounding areas of the *campo*, incorporating other skilled workers locally employed in sugar mills. The FT organised members according to the industrial branch in which they worked, in what was a partial embracing of industrial unionism, although reformist and not anarcho-syndicalist in nature.

Discontent soon spread from Cienfuegos to other regions and, by the end of October, more than 50 mills struck, mostly in Santa Clara and Camagüey, while isolated strikes were declared in Oriente, Matanzas, Havana and Pinar del Río [Carr, 1966:134].[60] US Marines were deployed near to sugar estates in those areas where US economic interests were strongest (notably in Oriente) in an attempt to discourage insurgency, thus protecting US-owned companies. In a bid to end the strikes, the government met employers to discuss the rising discontent and together they proposed that wages be increased by ten per cent, although they would not agree to a shorter working day. The workers and their leaders refused to compromise and the strikes continued, leading to arrests and the threatened

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[59] Martínez was a member of the Liberal Party and had close ties with the Partido Socialista de Cuba (PSC). He had been a rail mechanic and during the 1910s he opened up his own workshop. He remained faithful to the Liberal Party and later joined Machado's' government [Dumoulin, 1980:62].
[60] Carr has called these strikes "geographically limiting" [Carr, 1966:134]. The majority did take place within the confines of Santa Clara and Camagüey, although sugar mills existed in every province in the country. Strikes called in other areas would have resulted in greater disturbances and, therefore, a stronger bargaining position for workers.

deportation of foreign workers. Furthermore, the Centro Obrero in Cienfuegos was closed down and the right to organise was suspended. These repressive measures and fear of US occupation helped to defeat the strike, coupled with the somewhat elitist nature of the action that had been staged predominantly by skilled mechanics, ignoring the plight of field workers, who were unskilled but employed in their thousands.

The failure to recognise those workers who did not belong to the "aristocracy" of sugar production may have cost the strikers dear. The downing of tools by so many key employees would have brought the industry to a standstill, especially taking into consideration that at the time there was a supposed labour shortage on the island and that sugar bosses had urged the government to allow the importation of labourers from the nearby West Indies in order to make up for the shortfall. The president of the Cuba Railroad Company, Mr G.H. Whigham, believed that the labour shortage was a potential threat to stability on the island and, in July 1917, he reported to the British Consul that at least 100,000 Chinese workers should be recruited into Cuba if this were to be avoided [FO 371/2923: 39]. A strike declared by cane-cutters would have been propitious as, given the labour shortage, the deployment of strike-breakers would have proved extremely difficult, if not impossible. However, not only did the wave of protest fail to secure the support of field workers, but the action also took place in the midst of the *tiempo muerto* [dead season] when such workers were not even in employment. The cane-cutting season takes place from between January and June and delaying strike action by just two months might have attracted field workers, assuming they were courted, resulting in a deadlock in sugar production in Cuba.

While one strike dominated labour issues in the *campo*, businesses in Havana were affected by many smaller strikes, which culminated in a general strike towards the

end of 1918. The period leading up to the great unrest bore witness to a forging of solidarity among workers in the capital, in what can be seen as a prelude to the foundation of the first united workers' federation, the Federación Obrera de la Habana [FOH] (*Workers' Federation of Havana*) in 1920.[61] The Centro Obrero, which served as a union base and educational centre, was established at Egido 2 in Havana during 1917. According to Felipe Zapata,[62] an anarchist union leader at that time, the fact that the Centro housed many unions, whose members and leaders frequently had conflicting ideas, often led to clashes between the varying factions. It was a meeting point where anarchist unions such as the SGOIF and the Sindicato del Ramo de la Madera (*Woodworkers' Union*) sat alongside the reformist unions of the Havana Electric and Havana Central companies, for example. For this reason, Zapata explained "el predominate acento en Egido 2 (era) violento, atrabiliario, destructor y perturbador" (*the prevailing tone of in Egido 2 [was] violent, ill-tempered, destructive and disturbing)* [Zapata, August 1948:32].

Nonetheless, it was a step in the direction of unity, if only through the sharing of a building - a place where workers could voice their discontent to their peers. It was a period when the labour movement was only beginning to recover from the government's 1915 purge on working-class centres and periodicals. Few publications were being circulated at this time, although the service industry workers' mouthpiece, *El Dependiente*, managed to continue production until 1918 and the printers' *Memorandum Tipográfico*, being reformist and so less of a threat to the authorities and employers, even survived the brutality of the early Machado presidency in 1925 (see chapter 4). As there had been so little contact between workers outside their place of work until the foundation of the Centro Obrero, the meeting point must have been a welcome addition to the working-class cause.

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[61] The FOH is discussed in greater detail below.
[62] For more details on Zapata, see Chapter 3.

1917 also saw the foundation of what was initially a union for brewery workers, the SGOIF, which expanded to embrace those working in all areas of factory work, a type of employment that was becoming increasingly popular as more pasta, drink and confectionery-producing companies were set up in urban areas of western Cuba, in particular. Mendoza Rodriguez has pointed out that figures from the 1919 Cuban census show that, of a total population of just under three million inhabitants, 4.2% of that number were classified as being industrial workers, that is non-professionals, excluding those who worked on the land [Mendoza Rodríguez, 1985:91]. There existed "un proletariado artesenal con una bajísima concentración" (*a very small craft proletariat*) where each profession (aside from tobacco and dock workers) boasted fewer than 500 workers at any one time [Mendoza Rodríguez, 1985:94]. So, a central point for those employed in various occupations brought workers together and served as a base of solidarity and exchange. Furthermore, Egido 2 was the initial home of the SGOIF, the subject of this thesis, whose membership, by aiming to unite everyone employed in the manufacturing industry, far out-stripped the 500 limit to which Rodríguez referred.[63]

The most serious urban unrest of the late 1910's was instigated by the non-radical dock workers' union and by streetcar operators in Havana. The demand for higher wages by stevedores came with a threat that, unless employers raised pay, a strike would be declared, an undertaking that had the potential to paralyse the country as sugar exports would be halted, damaging the economy, while much needed food imports, in particular, would be confined to port. Tram employees, meanwhile, made a similar threat if they did not receive a pay rise, double pay after midnight, a day off with pay every two weeks and a modification of tram routes. The authorities reciprocated these threats, warning that striking workers would simply be replaced by

[63] According to the same 1919 census, 5,774 people were employed in Cuba's factories.

soldiers, while leaders of the action would be imprisoned [*Havana Post*, 10/09/1918:5].

The president of the Federación de Bahía, Gervasio Sierra,[64] sent a telegram to President Menocal that, unless demands were met within 48 hours, there would be a general walkout by harbour workers. This action illustrates the reformist nature of the strike and it was a tactic in no way typical of anarchists, who depended upon the spontaneous action of individuals. The demands were not met, prompting some 8,000 dock workers to support strike action [Mendoza Rodríguez, 1985:96].

This action was not violent, although that did not prevent the directorate of the harbour workers' union from being sentenced to 80 days in jail, charged with "conspiracy to intimidate" [*Havana Post*, 10/11/1918: 8]. While most imports were prevented from entering Cuba, "workers offered to unload foodstuffs consigned to various asylums and hospitals" [*Havana Post*, 05/11/1918:3]. The government's response to the non-movement of other goods was to deploy not only soldiers and police to act as strike-breakers and to ensure that the conflict was peaceful but to relocate hundreds of prisoners to the docks in order to help offload goods from the vessels [IHMCRSC, a, 1985:198]. Menocal, needing to appease US interests, maintained that it was Cuba's duty to ship sugar supplies to the Allies. Workers in other sectors did not adhere to this theory and, while dock workers in far-flung areas of Cuba, from Guantánamo in the east to Regla in the west, joined the strike, in Havana those employed in jobs as diverse as carpentry, construction and tailoring walked out in solidarity with the port workers. The harbour strike had become a general strike.

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[64] According to the British Consulate, the worker-leader Sierra was arrested for murder in 1910 [FO 371/3195:77]. He was "skillfully bought off" by Menocal during the 1918 strikes [Thomas, 1998: 534]. In 1919, he was ejected from May 1 demonstrations by fellow workers [Cabrera, 1985:330].

A decision to end the strike was taken not by those workers fighting for better pay but by the likes of the reformist leaders Sierra and José Bravo[65] and by the editors of non-worker, daily newspapers. Acting as arbiters, this group liaised with Menocal's government to release workers who had recently been arrested and to bring the strike to a close, with no apparent benefits to the strikers. Unimpressed with the deal, workers in Havana revolted and the same day as the agreement had been reached "the first serious trouble broke out in the heart of the city" [*Havana Post*, 14/11/1918:1]. In the ensuing unrest, trams, manned by strike-breakers, were attacked, one worker (Eusebio Campos) was dragged from his cab and beaten, tramlines were covered with soap and shots were fired. The authorities retaliated, arresting four drivers and temporarily closing the workers' centre at Egido 2, while a group of Spanish and Cuban workers, among them a cobbler, a barber, a builder and a trader, were detained for meeting on a park bench in the city [*La Lucha*, 14/11/1918:1].

A resolution was finally reached by which workers were assured that they would receive a 15% increase in their pay, a promise that bosses did not keep, encouraging further strikes in the coming years, but an action that nevertheless may have spurred rail workers to immediately follow suit and declare their own strike.

Rail workers in Camagüey made both political and economic demands on the companies for which they worked: a rise in wages, union recognition, the promise of non-intervention in Cuban affairs by the USA, the abolition of military service and a reduction in the cost of living. Railway employees in Havana and Santa Clara promptly joined the strike, inspiring those in other provinces to declare support for a new general strike. In Havana, stokers, typesetters, construction and metal workers

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[65] Bravo was, at this time, president of the executive committee for the general strike. He went on to co-found the FOH and was a tobacco workers' leader. For more information, see chapter 4

were among those to declare solidarity, forcing the government to send troops to coastal areas and ports and, once again, to deploy around 500 prisoners as strike-breakers, while small-business licences were revoked. One month after halting work, rail workers secured a partial success and wages were increased by 10%.

The port companies' failure to keep their end of the bargain led dock workers to declare further strikes, this time demanding not only wage rises but the right of the union, rather than the bosses, to hire workers. Strike action continued, igniting discontent and sparking more general strikes throughout 1919 and 1920. Cabrera has pointed out that, between the end of 1919 and August 1920, port workers struck almost continuously, only returning to work for very brief periods and at one point up to 1,600 prisoners were deployed to do the job [Cabrera, 1969: 63]. The country experienced strikes in many trades and areas: in Cienfuegos, trams stopped, builders struck and theatres closed their doors, from December to March printers in Havana demanded a 44-hour week (*la semana inglesa* or English week), higher wages and that bosses recognise union delegates and, in Camagüey, sugar crops were destroyed by angry workers, while train drivers refused to transport the product.[66]

The government and company bosses believed that the disturbances typified by these strikes were damaging to the country and were an attempt at civil war [Fernández, 2000:58]. The authorities came down hard on any effort at worker solidarity and in subsequent months constitutional guarantees were suspended, dozens of workers were expelled or imprisoned and the few worker publications that still existed were made illegal. Tellería Toca has pointed out that the last four years of the *Menocalista* bordered on dictatorship [Tellería Toca, 1984:182]. By July 1919, 104 undesirables had been deported and leading Cuban anarchists and anarcho-

[66] Private cars were hired to transport the sugar.

syndicalists were sentenced to death, a penalty that was duly lifted.[67] Some workers were killed by the authorities and the funeral of tailor Robustiano Fernández, shot by guards on the steps of Egido 2, became a worker demonstration on all-important May 1st. A parade from Egido 2 to Colón Cemetery was followed by a meeting at the Teatro Payret, a venue that, although large, reportedly could not house all the workers who wanted to attend the event [León Expósito, 1975:331]. It was at this meeting that solidarity with the Russian Revolution was first pledged, by an anarchist SGOIF member no less, at a time when little information about the atrocities being committed there had filtered through.[68]

After smashing unions, the government aimed to replace them with parallel reformist organisations and, in December 1918, the Centro de Asuntos Sociales [*Centre for Social Affairs*], an entity that boasted strong ties with the conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL), was forged, which "trató de establecer, sin éxito, delegaciones en todo el territorio nacional" (*tried to establish, without success, delegations throughout the national territory*) [IHMCRSC, a, 1985:203]. Skeleton worker parties were created that hinted at a socialist alliance, through names such as Partido Socialista Obrero (*Workers' Socialist Party*), Partido Federal Obrero (*Federal Workers' Party*) and Partido Socialista Radical (*Radical Socialist Party*). They were headed by pro-government elements, however, and in reality did little to alleviate the suffering of the workers [IHMRSC, a, 1985:204].

For its part, the labour movement began to gain lost ground, opening another "semi-clandestine" Centro Obrero at Zulueta 37 [Stubbs, 1985: 54], the location that became home to the FOH.

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[67] Among those sentenced were Marcelo Salinas, Antonio Penichet, Alfredo López, Alejandro Barreiro and Pablo Guerra. The jailing of particular leading organisers, including Penichet and Salinas was a common occurrence.
[68] Worker attitudes to the October Revolution and Bolshevism are discussed in greater detail below.

The FOH was set up amidst worker unrest and troubled times for the Cuban economy. The sugar shortage in Europe in particular, during the war years, had meant that millions of dollars had been ploughed into the Cuban sugar economy. The so called "Dance of the Millions", named after the wealth being accumulated in Cuba (the price of a pound of sugar reached 20 cents in 1919), did not last and, in 1920, the plummeting value of the crop caused banks and sugar holdings to collapse.[69] The country was in economic turmoil, although, as Pérez has pointed out, the crisis had a silver lining as it awakened the masses to the extent to which the country was directly and totally affected by external economic forces [Perez, 1993:48].

The first national worker congress of the decade was held at Egido 2 from 14 to 16 April, 1920. The Congress was initially called to discuss the low living standards being experienced by workers at a time of economic stagnation and to agree on sending a Cuban delegate to the third conference of the Confederación Obrera Pan-Americana (*Pan-American Worker Confederation)* [COPA], being held in Mexico two months later. Set up in 1918, the COPA was the joint brainchild of AFL President Samuel Gompers and the US State Department. It aimed to unite all workers in the American continent so that they could discuss ways to solve labour issues through liaison with employers and governments and, according to recent Cuban historiography, it had "el propósito de corromper el movimiento obrero en América Latina e impedir la influencia de las fuerzas patrióticas y antimperialistas en su seno" (*the aim of corrupting the labour movement in Latin American and of preventing the influence of patriotic and anti-imperialist forces at its core*) [IHMCRSC, a, 1985: 204).

The April Congress in Havana was the idea of reformist tobacco worker leader, José

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[69] It fell to 6 cents per pound in October 1920 and reached rock bottom at 3 cents in January 1921 [Kapcia, 2000: 66].

Bravo[70], who had been influential in the 1918 strike action of the train drivers[71] and who has been accused of acting as Gomper's tool to promote the AFL in Cuba [Estrada, 1951:25]. However, the Congress rejected the motion to send a Cuban delegate to Mexico and radical members such as López, Salinas and Barreiro, aware that it was a US governmental device, labelled COPA a yellow organisation.[72] Participants also claimed that it would be impossible for Cuba to send a delegate to the COPA conference as Gompers refused to admit black workers into the AFL and black workers were well represented within the Cuban labour movement. Any attempt by Gompers and Bravo to create a national reformist association in Cuba seriously backfired, key posts in the Congress going to the likes of the writer Marcelo Salinas and printer Alfredo López, both Cuban anarcho-syndicalists who were appointed Secretaries of the Congress, while Victor Recoba of the Federación Anarquista de Cuba (*Anarchist Federation of Cuba)* was on the Committee. Congress delegates, the majority of whom were from the Havana province, instead sent a greeting to the USSR, an act that did not necessarily indicate that many present were Marxist (the word or its significance was not mentioned) but that they displayed solidarity with the workers of Russia. As Fernández has pointed out, news of Bolshevik persecution had not yet reached many outside of Russia [Fernández, 2000: 59], the reality of which would later inflame most anarchists. This show of international solidarity was extended when delegates pledged support for the two Italian anarchists, Nicolá Sacco and Bartlomeo Vanzetti, who were charged with killing a shoe factory paymaster and his guard in Boston, USA in 1920.

The Congress berated the Cuban government for the economic crisis and demanded solutions to the high cost of living. While some (reformist) members called for

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[70] For more on Bravo, see Chapter 3.
[71] The Hermandad Ferrovaria de Cuba (Rail Workers' Brotherhood of Cuba) was the only union in Cuba to belong to the COPA and acted as promoter of the Confederation.
[72] That is, it pandered to the wishes of the state and employers, rather than to the needs of the workers.

government arbitration in the matter, others (anarcho-syndicalists) demanded direct action. A Comité Conjunto (*Joint Committee*), composed of delegates from each province, was set up to resolve the discrepancy. It was the Committee's job to liaise with all unions and to propose a solution to the problem at a national congress, due to be held on 1 January 1921. The congress never took place and the foundation of a national organisation in Cuba was delayed until 1925, although collectives in Havana did hold congresses on a number of occasions, finally setting up the FOH in May 1922.[73]

Shortly after the April Congress, Penichet and Salinas were once again arrested, charged with inciting factory workers in the Havana district of Cerro to strike action, although it is more likely that their imprisonment was the government's attempt to weaken the labour movement by depriving it of two of its most influential personalities. Again the plan backfired. The printers' unions, the Asociación de Tipógrafos en General and the Asociación de Litógrafos, called an extraordinary meeting at Egido 2 and approved 72-hour strike action as a protest against the arrests, to begin on 1 May 1920, a motion backed by the SGOIF. A meeting was held at the Teatro Nacional and, when bombs exploded there, the government reacted by arresting five more worker leaders, among them Alfredo López and the anarchists Nicasio Trujillo and Pablo Guerra, all charged with a breach of the Ley de Explosivos (*Explosives' Law).* The men were eventually released, López spending 90 days in jail.

The brutal rule of Menocal was followed by the relatively moderate government of Alfredo Zayas in 1921, who rose to power after further contested elections, corruption and the fear of another Liberal uprising. Not until General Enoch Crowder,

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[73] Meetings were held on 26/11/1920, 09/08/1921, 15/09/1921 and 04/10/1921. On each occasion between 15 and 18 collectives attended. It was during the October session that the FOH was founded. The resolutions of the FOH are discussed below.

representing the US government, arranged for new, fairer elections to be held, did the Liberals abstain from the race and Zayas entered office unchallenged. The new government, however, ushered in a fresh period of corruption, Zayas being "a cultivated, opportunistic lawyer almost totally free of moral scruples" [Pérez, 1993: 48]. However, as Fernández has pointed out, his presidency treated the labour movement less harshly than that of Menocal and so, being freer to use propaganda, it was during this time that "se inicia la etapa más constructiva del anarquismo en Cuba" (*the most constructive period of anarchism began in Cuba*) [Fernández, 2000: 59].

Although no national organisation had yet come into being, the workers of Havana had managed to group together, in what can be seen as the first organisation in Cuba to embrace a wide range of worker unions, attracting those from the manufacturing industry, cigar makers, cobblers, tailors, metal and woodworkers and builders, among others. After two preliminary meetings, seventeen worker organisations met on 15 September 1921, at the headquarters of the cigar-rollers' union, la Sociedad de Torcedores, in Havana, "con el propósito de constituir la Federación Obrera de la Habana [FOH]" (*with the intention of building the Workers' Federation of Havana*) [FOH, 2]. The meeting named the delegate of the printers' union, José Peña Vilaboa, as Secretary, while the tobacco union representative, Alejandro Barreiro, was named President.[74] The union was set up legally and a standing order was sent to the State Governor for legal sanction, which "conforme a las leyes del país; llevando la firma y los sellos auténticos de catorce

[74] In a subsequent meeting on 4th October, 1921, Barreiro's title changed to General Secretary, while Alfredo López and the construction workers' union delegate, J. Eduardo Alpízar, were nominated Deputy-General Secretary and Deputy-Financial Secretary, respectively.

organisaciones" (*conforms with the laws of the country; bearing the signatures and official stamps of fourteen organisations*) [IHMCRSC, b, 1975:350].[75]

The FOH was decidedly anarcho-syndicalist in nature, apparent through analysis of the resolutions passed during the first Congress in 1922. A number of Committees were set up during the Congress, whose function it was to study contemporary issues: a committee for education, a committee that would be responsible for the setting up of the FOH's periodical (this never happened) and a committee for the foundation of another, nation-wide federation. The Congress discussed the need to introduce equal pay for women and, while they could not abolish child labour (it was agreed that many homes depended on a child's wage for survival), it was concluded that, depending on age and strength, a child should never work more than six hours per day. The Congress also decided that piecework was "inmoral y perjudicial a la clase obrera" (*immoral and harmful to the working class*) [IHMCRSC, b, 1985:354].

Members agreed to pay five cents monthly in subscriptions, to be collected by each organisation and handed into the Financial Secretary, who, along with the General Secretary and two Deputies, would be voted for by the Committee and would hold post for one year. An ordinary congress would be held every six months, while extraordinary congresses were possible if two-thirds of member collectives so required in writing. The Federation gave autonomy to each union, although all had the right to FOH support in times of struggle. It was a united worker front of resistance, education and guidance with the "afinidad y cohesión, de evitar ser absorbido por la burguesía organizada" (*affinity and cohesion to avoid being absorbed by the organised bourgeoisie*) [IHMCRSC, b, 1985: 357]. The FOH

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[75]From the minutes of the 19th November 1921 meeting it is clear that neither the Internacional de Concineros (*Union of Chefs and Cooks*) or the Sociedad de Barnizadores (*Glazers' Union*) attended, while the Union de Dependientes del Ramo del Tobaco (*Tobacco Workers' Union*) had expressed the wish not to form part of the FOH. All three unions had sent delegates to the 15th September meeting, explaining the discrepancy between the fourteen signatures on the order and the seventeen unions present on that date.

embraced as its principles "la lucha de clases, acción directa y reachacen colectivamente la acción electoral" (*the class war, direct action and collectively rejecting electoral action*) [IHMCRSC, b, 1985:357]. The FOH was at the forefront of many struggles during the following years, not only within the confines of Havana province but spreading its influence to become involved in lengthy strikes declared in the *campo.*[76]

The sugar strikes of 1924, backed by the FOH, were a response to the growing displacement of sugar workers at a time when rationalisation continued to transform many workplaces, particularly in the eastern mills. US investment in the sugar industry persisted throughout the 1920s and O'Brien has noted that:

> By 1923 the ten largest American holding companies, including Cuban Cane Sugar, Cuban American, General Sugar and Punta Alegre, controlled 54 of the 182 mills in Cuba and accounted for over half of the island's production [O'Brien, 1996:216].

As each company aimed to derive the maximum production possible from these mills, massive imports of machinery were made, in the hope that the long-term effect of the introduction of this new equipment would be to help replace a labour-intensive industry with a capital-intensive one [O'Brien,1996: 216]. As more new electrical equipment, unloading systems, methods of extraction and management techniques were introduced, the sugar mills were rapidly converted into modern mills, company bosses even finding a way to drastically speed up the sugar grinding season, saving on labour costs. These technological advances, while improving output and efficiency, led to a loss of identity and place of purpose among workers who began to experience underemployment and the displacement of man by machine. The entrepreneurial tendency to value speed and volume over workers in the pursuit of cheaper goods led, in the sugar mills, to an angry workforce that now demanded

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[76] The 1924 train and sugar strikes are dealt with in greater detail in later chapters.

better working conditions and union recognition, a right that would give unions, and so workers, more power in the workplace. As early as 1911, Lindsey had observed that Cuban workers at best felt undervalued by US bosses and at worst abused by them:

> Beneath a most unimposing exterior a Cuban laborer generally manages to cherish a considerable sense of personal dignity and he resents deeply, however unperturbed he may appear, the rough handling that has come to mean so little to his fellow laborer in the U.S.. Perhaps the unexpressed contempt with which he is tolerated by some Americans is resented still more deeply... Nowhere else (in the world) does the least considered member of a community aspire to social equality with its most exalted personage [Lindsey, 1911:132].

Such resentment triggered the sugar strikes of 1924, which disrupted the industry throughout much of that year (the strikes are analysed in more detail in chapters 4 and 5) and were supported by other workers' unions. The FOH, which, although it supported such worker action, did not enjoy complete popularity among the radical working class. The anarchist periodical *Acción Consciente* (*Conscious Action*) found the federation to be too centralised, arguing that it placed too much emphasis on bureaucracy. It urged members to demand that their subscriptions be used not on committees (or on the wages of committee members) but on books, schools and periodicals, that is, things that would help to educate the masses. In fact, a study of FOH expenditure records shows that a large quantity of those subscriptions did help pay for the rationalist school set up by it. A FOH rationalist school was set up at Zulueta 37 in October, 1922 and initially registered just eleven students, including two of López's children and two of Barreiro's [Shaffer, 1998:266]. The school, which offered education to children for four hours during the daytime and classes to adults in the evening, soon attracted other pupils, boasting an intake of 55 children and 72 adults in February 1923, rising to 76 children by March [Shaffer, 1998:268]. While other rationalist schools were founded in Banes and Cárdenas and another by the

SGOIF,[77] "the largest and most successful school was the FOH school in Havana" [Shaffer, 1998:267]. The school offered the usual subjects of language, history and science and, while concentrating on educating its pupils in the importance of hygiene and physiology, it aimed to prepare children for their lives as workers. The wages generated by subscriptions, to which *Acción Consciente* referred, may well have concerned the salaries paid to three teachers at the school: José Miguel Pérez, later deported by Machado in his role of the Partido Comunista de Cuba's (*Cuban Communist Party*) [PCC] Secretary General; regular FOH committee member and founder of the PCC, José Peña Vilaboa, and Eloisa Barreira, the wife of Alejandro, who was the FOH Financial Secretary at that time and co-founder of PCC [FOH: 33]. It was during this period then that, as some Marxists were employed as educators, workers and their offspring were probably first exposed to the ideas of Marxism through learning.

The pulling-together of workers and those involved in education became more pronounced when, in November 1923, the adult education institute, the Universidad Popular José Martí (José Martí Popular University) [UPJM], was founded. The UPJM was the product of collaboration between Alfredo López and Julio Antonio Mella. Mella was a student who had set up the Federación Estudantil Universitaria (*Federation of University Students*) [FEU], founded as a reaction against the corruption rife in the university sector and demanding university reform through campus occupation. Although a Marxist who helped found the PCC, Mella looked upon the veteran anarcho-sydicalist López as his mentor and their friendship spurred them to found the UPJM, which complemented the FOH school at Zulueta 37. The institution offered additional free evening classes to working adults, who were instructed by recent graduates of the University of Havana, including the poet Ruben Martínez Villena, who, along with the socialist Carlos Baliño (see below) and Mella,

[77] The SGOIF rationalist school is dealt with in Chapter 3.

founded the Liga Antimperialista (*Anti-imperialist League),* and who was leader of the *Protest of the 13;* a body of intellectuals that denounced corruption in education and government.[78]

During the same year, the anti-corruption Veterans' and Patriots' Association was founded (in which Martínez Villena was also active), although it was short-lived and collapsed after staging an uprising in Las Villas. All of the above associations set up in 1923 cited common grievances: they either aimed to combat the corruption of the Zayas government or imperialism, or both. As Marxism was gradually becoming better known, some of those active in other organisations began to join socialist groupings, culminating in the foundation of the first communist party in Cuba, the PCC, in August, 1925.

Socialism had not been any great force in Cuba during the early twentieth century. The voting system was not open to everyone, since recent arrivals from other countries were disenfranchised, as were women.[79] In 1901, suffrage was available to just one-third of all Cuban males and to a mere 5% of the total population [Schaffer, 1988:17]. Those Cuban males eligible to vote were often mistrustful of the electoral process, wary of the level of corruption in Cuban politics and for these reasons any attempt at forming a socialist party on the island was little supported. Anarcho-syndicalist unions, through which workers could take matters into their own hands, or reformist ones, through which negotiations could be made with the state or employers, proved more popular. Attempts, however, were made at forming socialist associations particularly by the indefatigable Carlos Baliño. One of the founders of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano that had fought for an independent Cuba, Baliño founded the first socialist alliance in Cuba, the Club de Propaganda Socialista in

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[78] Martínez Villena also went on to become President of the national worker confederation, the CNOC, in 1927 and leader of the PCC.
[79] The voting system is discussed in Chapter 3.

1903 and went on to form the nationwide Partido Obrero Socialista [80] (*Socialist Workers' Party*) in 1905. The party attracted little worker support, maybe due to its unwillingness to back many of the strikes of the period. The Partido Socialista de Manzanillo in Oriente, founded by the Spaniard Agustín "Martinillo" Martín in 1906, did support a localised strike at the Niquero sugar company in 1912 while the Agrupación Socialista de la Habana (*Socialist Grouping of Havana*) [ASH], had added weight to the sewerage workers' strike of 1911.

With the advent of the Russian Revolution in 1917, Baliño[81] went on to form the ASH which identified with the workers of Russia and aimed to spread Marxism to all workers in Cuba. Although the ASH attracted a couple of respected worker leaders, such as Peña Vilaboa and Barreiro, it failed in its quest to widen its influence and not until 1923 did the first communist body appear in the form of the Agrupación Comunista de la Habana (*Communist Association of Havana*) [CAH], setting a precedent for similar associations that same year in Guabanacoa, Manzanillo, Bayamo, Guantánamo, Media Luna, San Antonio de los Baños, Palma Soriano, and other places.

In Havana in mid-August 1925, just nine days after the formation of the Confederación Nacional de Obreros de Cuba [CNOC] (see below for more on CNOC), seventeen people met in Havana in a Congress that resulted in the formation of the PCC. Five workers attended this Congress, all of whom had been union delegates to either or both the FOH and CNOC. The following worker-leaders had been present at the most recent CNOC Congress: Alejandro Barreiro, representative of the FOH and of the Unión de Obreros de la Industria de Cigarrería

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[80] This changed its name to Partido Socialista de Cuba (*Socialist Party of Cuba*) the following year.
[81] Among the periodicals published by Baliño were *Justicia (1920/21)*, *Espártaco* (1922) and *Lucha de Clases* (1924/25) which expounded Marxist theories and for which Peña Vilaboa and M. Pérez, both leading members of the FOH, wrote.

en General (*General Tobacco Industry Workers' Union*); Miguel Valdés, representative of the Federación de Trabajadores de Tabaco en Rama de Cuba (*Federa*tion *of Cuban Tobacco Sowers*) and of the Sociedad de Resistencia de Torcedores de San Antonio de los Baños (*Resistance Society of Cigarmakers of San Antonio de los Baños*); Venancio Rodríguez, representative of the Sociedad de Torcedores de Guanabacoa (*Society of Cigarmakers of Guanabacoa*) and Emilio Rodriguéz, representative of the Gremio de Despalilladores de San Antonio de los Baños (*Union of Tobacco Sorters of San Antonio de los Baños*). Along with José Peña Vilaboa, the first Secretary of the FOH, these men were the only workers present at the formation of the PCC and each possessed an insight into the running of worker associations on the island. The Congress discussed the importance of infiltrating unions in order to spread the influence of communism to the workers of Cuba [IHMCRSC, b, 1985: 445-451].

Although no reference was made to the FOH or the CNOC in the first PCC meeting, the group discussed the need to "adoptar un programa concreto de reivindicaciones para los obreros y campesinos, que le permitiera entablar con ellos vínculos fraternales de lucha" (*adopt a concrete programme of demands for workers and peasants, that would allow it to strike up with them a brotherly bond of struggle*) [IHMCRSC, a, 1985:231]. Neither was there any recorded mention of the predominance of anarcho-syndicalists in recent worker organisations and congresses, although the group must have been aware of the importance of wresting influence from them in a bid to construct a solid party based along Marxist-Leninist lines.

For their part, anarcho-syndicalists were split on the theme of communism, and more particularly of Russia and Bolshevism. While some writers in worker periodicals

hoped that the new regime in Russia could still prove its worth, other anarchist periodicals had voiced their complete mistrust of all connected with Marxism:

> ... sin hacernos falsas ilusiones, sin equivocarnos sobre su alcance y significación; previmos su marcha lenta y penosa porque vimos todavía potentes esos grandes enemigos del progreso y de la emancipación humana: La ignorancia y su hábito de la obediencia, y la política y su espíritu conservador de dominación (*without false illusions, without being mistaken about its reach and significance; we foresee its slow and painful march because we still strongly see those large enemies of progress and human emancipation: ignorance and its custom of obedience and politics with its conservative spirit of domination*) [*Acción Consciente*, 25/12/1922:1).

According to *¡Tierra!*, the seeds of communism had already been sown among workers. In October 1924, the periodical reported that some conferences and cultural events held at the Centro Obrero in Havana had defended communism while mounting "un ataque furibundo a la Anarquía" (*a furious attack on Anarchism*) [*¡Tierra!* 09/10/1924]. The article enquired whether this position was supported by the FOH, a question that seems justified when taking into account that figures such as Barreiro and Peña Vilaboa, both communists, had played such a prominent role in the local organisation.

The presence of communism became even more apparent on 22 August 1925, when, at the Parque de Marte, an anti-imperialist meeting was held, in which López, Barreiro, Mella and Alfonso Bernal de Riesgo spoke. Both Mella and Bernal, described as "intelectuales revolucionarios" [IHMCRSC, a, 1975: 210], addressed the large congregation alongside "un compañero chino y otro hebreo (quienes) hablaron en sus idiomas y fueron muy aplaudidos por sus camaradas" (*a Chinese comrade and another Jewish comrade (who) spoke in their languages and were heavily applauded by their companions*) [*El Progreso*, 1925, r: 1]. A Jewish contingent was also present at the August PCC Congress, and it appears likely that the speaker at

the anti-imperialist gathering was also one of these founding members.[82] A 1925 manifesto released by the Anti-Imperialist League, part of a world-wide Comintern front activity [Thomas, 1998: 578], declared that

> Cuba debe ser para los cubanos. Esto no quiere decir odio al *extranjero*, quiere decir odio al *capital extranjero,*[83] que desconoce la necesidades de los comerciantes, de los colonos, de los obreros, de los empleados ... (*Cuba must be for the Cubans. That doesn't mean hate for the foreigner, it means hate for foreign capital, which does not recognise the needs of the traders, the sugar planters, the workers, the clerks* ...) [Rossell, 1973:108].

As little as two days had elapsed between the resolution passed by the PCC to spread Marxism-Leninism in Cuba and the August anti-imperialist rally.[84]

The foundation of the PCC came hot on the heels of the CNOC. Meeting in December 1924, delegates of the FOH had decided that the time was ripe for the first national worker organisation, particularly in light of the sugar strikes that had been sweeping the Cuban countryside that year (see chapter 3). A date for the Congress was set for 15 –19 February in Cienfuegos, an important sugar-producing region that had played a significant role in previous worker struggles, especially in Cruces. Sugar workers, the largest group of workers in Cuba, sent delegates from just one union to the February conference.[85] That they had failed to organise as an industry and did not yet participate in national worker discussions was not lost on organisers, who saw the inclusion of sugar workers as a key element if a truly national organisation were to be formed. Cienfuegos as a choice of venue for what was to become known as Segundo Congreso Obrero Nacional (*Second National Worker Congress*) [SCON] was, therefore, symbolic.

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[82] Jewish founders of the PCC were Yoshka Grinberg and Yunger Semjovich (later known as Fabio Grobart) of the Sección Hebrea (*Jewish Section*) and Félix Gurbich of the Juventud Comunista Hebrea (*Jewish Communist Youth*). Jewish immigrants from Poland had set up a communist Grouping (*Agrupación Comunista*) in 1925 [Benjamin, 1975:81].
[83] Emphasis in original.
[84] The PCC Congress closed on 20th August 1925.
[85] Francisco Arís and Lucas Saín Bolívar attended from the Unión de Trabajadores de la Industria Azucarera de Puerto Padre in Oriente [Tellería Toca, 1984:120].

SCON laid the foundation for the CNOC, which was officially founded at a third worker congress in Camagüey in August 1925. SCON resolutions were similar to those of the FOH in that its 105 delegates, representing 75 unions, voted to reject any electoral action, condemned arbitration with the government and employers and condoned the use of direct action and class struggle. The new Confederation's "Tactics and Principles" detailed this:

> Considerando que la colaboración con las demás clases sociales entraña en sí cierto confusionismo del que siempre resultamos engañados los trabajadores; sabiendo por experiencia que todo {intermediario} entre el capital y nosotros sólo viene a perturbaar nuestra marcha progresiva, tratando de anular nuestros esfuerzos; viendo que la política es la fuente de todas las inmoralidades, la cizañadora de todas nuestras luchas internas y la raíz de todos los males de la sociedad presente, el Segundo Congreso Obrero Nacional acuerda declarar que adopta como principio la Lucha de Clase, la Acción Directa y que rechaza Colectivamente la Acción Electoral (*Given that collaboration with other social classes carries with it a certain confusion from which we, the workers, always end up being deceived; knowing through experience that all {intermediaries} between capital and ourselves only serve to hinder our way forward, trying to override our efforts; seeing that politics is the source of all immorality, the reason for all our internal struggles and the root of all evil in present society, the Second National Worker Congress agrees to adopt as its principle Class Struggle, Direct Action and to Collectively reject Electoral Action)* [IHMCRSC, b, 1985: 400].

The Congress also rejected motions for the creation of worker pensions, the introduction of an "accidents at work" law and for a minimum wage as fixed by the state, all of which were typical of motions put forward by reformist delegates. Instead, it agreed on decidedly anarcho-syndicalist resolutions, such as the eight-hour day (or 44-hour week), rest from toil on a Sunday, support for strike action, a minimum wage fixed by the union, sexual equality and the creation of more rationalist schools, cultural conferences and worker centres. Delegates stood against the foundation of parallel unions in any trade and passed a resolution not to bureaucratise the Confederation, leaving each locality to run its own internal affairs. Despite these motions, not all delegates were anarcho-syndicalists. Instead the

CNOC was made up of a coalition of anarcho-syndicalist, reformist and communist members.

It is important that the influence of reformist unions over workers not be underestimated. Key workers in the transport sector, docks and trains particularly, and in the tobacco factories were led by reformist unions who had bargained with employers and the state in order to secure demands for their members (dock workers from 1918 to 1920, train drivers in 1920 and 1924 and tobacco workers in almost every strike that they had declared, for example). Partly for that reason, those influenced by anarchism, as communists, understood the need to infiltrate unions and to win over already unionised workers, thus sympathising with the writings of Malatesta:

> One must (therefore) find ways of living among non-anarchists, as anarchistically as possible, (and) which will further our propaganda and offer possibilities of applying our ideas [in Richards, 1993:152].

The hope by anarchists that they could exert their influence through the FOH and CNOC and gain more support among workers was dashed in part by the rise of communism in Cuba, an ideology that allowed for a more solid base of organisation than anarchism ever would,[86] and, in part by the rise to power of a new President of Cuba in May 1925, General Gerado Machado.[87] At first, Machado appeared to be the Cuban leader that the country had been awaiting: someone who would reform the US Reciprocity Treaty and dispense with the Platt Amendment (or so he alleged in his inauguration programme) [Domínguez, 1986:35]. In a country where anger and suspicion of the US government had been at the forefront of economic and political issues, this move would have proved popular among many sectors of the population.

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[86] Discussed in Chapter 4.
[87] The early rule of Machado is well documented in Chapter 5.

However, Machado was not only an attractive option to the population of Cuba as:

> In the eyes of most American statesmen and business executives, Gerado Machado proved to be the Cuban president for whom they had been searching for a quarter of a century. While appealing to and partially appeasing Cuban nationalism, Machado respected and protected American investments, providing the stable political environment in which American companies could thrive. Most importantly, Machado proved his value to American corporations by meeting and mastering the challenge presented by resistant workers and local elites [O'Brien, 1996: 230].

At a business lunch at the Bankers' Club in New York in April 1925, the new President assured sugar magnates that their investments would not be affected merely because a new government was about to take power:

> Quiero asegurar a los hombres de negocios presentes aquí y a los que no están, que tendrán todos una garantía absoluta para sus intereses bajo la administración cubana (*I would like to assure all the businessmen here present, and those who are not, that you have an absolute guarantee about your interests under the Cuban administration*) [in Rosell, 1973:53].

He also promised US businesses that no labour strike on the island would ever last more than 24 hours [Rosell, 1973: 53]. Just days after the formation of the CNOC, Machado aimed to smash unions and halt worker revolt using a blend of assassination, detention, expulsion and suppression, a commitment that, as will be examined, in no small way contributed to the demise of anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba.

Chapter 2

Forerunners to the SGOIF – Anarcho-Syndicalism among Café, Hotel and Restaurant Workers

In 1907, the first worker periodical was published devoted to those employed in Cuba's cafés, hotels and restaurants, including chefs, bar staff and waiters. The periodical aimed to alert readers to the social injustices experienced by workers in that sector. For ten years one of two periodicals ran, *La Voz del Dependiente* (*The Voice of the Service Worker*) being published from 1907 until 1911, when its name was changed to simply *El Dependiente* (*The Service Worker*), which ceased publication in 1917. Throughout their life spans, the periodicals were dedicated to libertarian ideals and through them the evolutionary process of anarchist-related thought can be traced. Various strands of anarchism were propagated in these publications and in particular the juxtaposition of the debate surrounding industrial unionism and the search for a moralistic society is evident. Common to all anarchistic thought, the need to secure immediate economic and social gains sat side-by-side with the hope for an egalitarian future and, in this search, distinct but not necessarily contradicting anarchisms were adhered to. The benefits of anarcho-naturism, for example, were published in *El Dependiente* alongside articles that propagated the use of direct action.

The openness of anarchism and its offshoots encouraged a spectrum of ideas to reach those who might embrace it and so the apparent inconsistencies detectable in the periodicals should not surprise students of anarchism. Throughout Latin America, the 1910s was essentially an era when the boundaries of anarchist thought were changeable[88] and a study of the long-standing libertarian publication, *El*

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[88] That is, there was a general move from anarchism to anarcho-syndicalism. Anarchism is by its very nature amorphous.

Dependiente, gives an insight into the amorphous nature of anarchism during this period in Cuban history. The writers and editors, and one supposes the readers, of *El Dependiente* were among the first to condone the use of direct action in the Cuban workplace and they were certainly the instigators of discussions surrounding the pitfalls and benefits of industrial unionism. In these respects, *El Dependiente*, particularly, can be seen as a forerunner to *El Progreso*, and, although the two periodicals were not aimed at those employed in the same workplace, the closeness of those who served food and drink and those who produced consumer goods becomes evident through examination of the mouthpieces written both for and by them, in terms of social cohesion and the ideas generated among the workers. At times, *El Dependiente* declared boycotts of those goods made by the very factory workers who would later make up part of the SGOIF, and, although such action was not staged in direct support of the factory workers, it must have helped awaken them to certain forms of direct action. A study of café and restaurant workers, therefore, aids an understanding of the theoretical and practical path followed by those employed in the manufacturing industry from 1917 to 1925.

Sowing the seeds of Direct Action in the Cuban Workplace[89]

From its first edition [26/07/1911], *El Dependiente* promoted the use of direct action tactics in order to achieve benefits in the workplace. Responding to the failed strike of sewerage workers in Havana, called in retaliation against poor wages and unacceptable working conditions, the periodical condemned the absence of solid worker organisation and the futility of pacific strikes. The lack of cohesion among workers in the Huelga del Alcantarillado (*Sewerage Strike*) in July 1911 has been

[89] Chapter 5 studies in depth the origins of direct action and its use by the SGOIF. The most common forms of direct action in Cuba during the 1910s and 1920s were sabotage, the boycott and the strike, while the General Strike was considered, by anarcho-syndicalists world-wide, the most revolutionary of possible revolutionary acts.

blamed, by latter-day historians, partly on the Spanish anarchist character of the strike organisers, the Agrupación Socialista [Ibarra, 1992:141], and partly on the creation of a reactionary union, the Federación de Trabajadores Cubanos (*Federation of Cuban Workers*) [FTC]. Contemporary reports in worker periodicals, however, bemoaned the presence not of anarchist but socialist elements in the strike and the libertarian periodical *Vía Libre*, denied that the expelled organisers Antonio Vieytes and Severino Chacón were rebellious (anarchist) agitators, contending that they were hard working men whose political leanings were Marxist [*Vía Libre*, 5/08/1911: 1]. *El Dependiente* agreed that the strike was not anarchist in nature and so anarchists could not be blamed for its collapse, as most of the organisers were socialist, and adherents to ideologies other than socialism had not played any significant role in the strike. Indeed, if anarchists had taken more of a lead in the strike it may not have been a failure, the periodical noted, especially in light of the tactics of repression used by the then Secretary of State, Machado, and the strike-breakers employed by him through the FTC:

> ...nuestro propósito es combatir ese afán de pacifismo que en horas inoportunas suelen predicar en tribunas y periódicos los amantes de lo establecido, los respetadores de lo que dicen combatir, en una palabra, los socialistas (*our aim is to combat the urge towards pacifism that the lovers of the established order, those who respect what they feign to combat, in a word, the socialists, usually preach at inopportune moments through tribunes and periodicals*) [*El Dependiente*, 26/7/1911: 1].

The strikers had lacked revolutionary spirit, noted *El Dependiente* and unless the workers were well organised, peaceful strikes did not and could not combat the established order:

> ...las huelgas pacíficas – cuando los obreros caracen de organización y no están solidamente unidos – son un fracaso... (...*peaceful strikes – when the workers lack organisation and are not completely united – are a failure...*) [*El Dependiente*, 26/07/1911: 1]

The strike was neither of resistance nor attack, it concluded, and if the workers were to overcome repression, they needed to react with violence where necessary. Such references to the need to fight violence and subordination with violence were repeated in later issues of *El Dependiente*. In December 1912, for example, the paper vindicated the use of sabotage, contending that it was the:

> ...arma de combate que es esgrimida con un éxito verdadero...el cual sirve prácticamente a los esclavos del salario en todo momento de huelga o en todo momento en que haya algo pendiente con los tiranos y explotadores (*...combative weapon that is used with true success ... that so practically helps wage slaves when they are on strike or when they take issue with tyrants and exploiters*) [*El Dependiente*, 10/12/12: 2].

The periodical declared that violent sabotage, if used defensively, was warranted: "A todo acto violento por nuestra parte, ha precedido una violencia por la parte contraria, que nos justifica" (*violence used by the enemy has preceded every violent act on our part, and so we are justified*) [*El Dependiente*, 20/05/1912:1]. Despite the real capacity to perform violent sabotage, such as the poisoning of food or the deliberate breaking of cooking equipment, there is no evidence to suggest that such acts were ever committed by these workers. As Shaffer has pointed out, the use of "publicity sabotage", whereby workers informed diners of the inhumane conditions they were forced to endure by employers, could prove as effective [Shaffer, 1998: 163]. This "open-mouth sabotage" [*Industrial Worker*, 15/01/1914:1] was a popular tool of the IWW, which encouraged workers in London to inform consumers of the squalor in which they worked and lived (at this time in Cuba, most *dependientes* lived in dirty, tiny attic rooms that doubled as storage rooms in their place of employment). If in-house secrets were divulged to customers, it was hoped that, seeing the effect on the quality of their own dining experience, they would at once side with employees over employers and demand more hygienic conditions:

> ... let the dishwashers, waiters and other hotel and restaurant workers tell of conditions under which dishes are "washed" and the order "prepared" and the employers will be forced into submission [*Industrial Worker*, 15/01/1914: 4].

The low levels of hygiene experienced by many café, hotel and restaurant workers in Cuba, coupled with extremely long working hours, was the main complaint voiced by them. *El Dependiente* reported that employees suffered up to sixteen-hour workdays and, unlike most anarcho-syndicalists, they did not call for this to be reduced to eight hours but were content to settle at a ten-hour day. In any case a sharp reduction in the working day would affect pay for some as tips gained often supported the meagre wages earned by waiters, in particular. In order to achieve fewer working hours, "open-mouth sabotage" was perhaps seen to be the most practical tool, although a study of the periodical shows that the ideas surrounding more traditional forms of direct action were also circulated among workers:

> Cuando el BOICOT[90] esgrimamos, y hasta el SABOTAJE, contra todos los verdugos y explotadores, será cuando habremos enterado, conscientes, en el concierto de lo que *EL DEPENDIENTE* divulga incesantemente (*When we brandish the boycott and even sabotage against the executioners, will be the day that we will have consciously achieved everything that El Dependiente has always stood for*) [*El Depiendiente*, 14/08/1912: 3].

Many of the workplaces, with the exception of the larger hotels in Havana, operated on a small-scale and so in the event of an all-out strike at any one establishment employing, say, just four or five workers, the employers found the staff easily replaceable. The failure of strike action was further exacerbated by the lack of cohesion among service workers as although they all shared a common ground insofar as they could follow work-related news through their periodical, they had not managed to federate into one solid union.[91]

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[90] Upper case is used in the original version.
[91] Industrial unionism among service industry workers is discussed below, this chapter.

Neither was the use of boycotts always a reliable weapon in their own sphere, although they were propagated by *El Dependiente* and used in solidarity with workers in other sectors. Eating establishments proved difficult to boycott as, firstly, they were not exclusively frequented by workers and so, to be truly effective, boycotts needed the support of all classes and, secondly, because those who read the periodical were, in the main, service industry workers, who spent the bulk of their lives in their own workplaces and usually lacked free time to frequent other houses, rendering boycotts of them useless. On the other hand, boycotts of products sold in the workplace, such as locally supplied soft drink or beer were commonplace. When the beer and ice company *La Tropical* refused to recognise the Unión de Dependientes de Cafés (UDC - *the Café Workers' Union*) and the Sindicato de Restaurantes, Hoteles y fondas (SRHF - *Hotel, Restaurant and Bar Workers' union*), whose members regularly staffed open days hosted by the company, *El Dependiente* urged readers to boycott three beers produced by the company [*El Dependiente*, 10/01/1912:1].

In 1912, the Ley de Cierre (*Closing Law)* was introduced, a law that restricted the opening of cafés to ten hours per day, and thus one that should have precluded the sixteen-hour shifts undertaken by workers. The law was not adhered to and, headed by café owner Manuel G Arias, employers set up the "Centro de Cafés" that campaigned for the abolition of the law. Arias was also a distributor of mineral waters and so *El Dependiente* declared all products linked to him boycotted [*El Dependiente*, 24/12/1913:4], an action that aimed to gain the support of café workers while encouraging staff to refuse to serve boycotted goods, or else they could blend the boycott with "open-mouth sabotage" by informing customers of all the moral (and legal) reasons why they should not consume them.

Products declared off-bounds to sympathetic consumers[92] by *El Dependiente* included brands of drink and cigarettes produced by companies that had subjected workers to unfair treatment.[93] As discussed, boycotts and sabotage, in particular, fully entered worker vocabulary in Cuba through articles and news published in *El Dependiente* and the use of these tools of working-class struggle accelerated, alongside anarcho-syndicalism, throughout the 1910s, climaxing in the 1920s when the SGOIF executed them to the point of "abuse" [Alonso, 1928: 249]. Throughout the life of *El Dependiente*, though, anarcho-syndicalism was not the only ideology embraced by its readers as, striving for moral betterment and an immediate solution to the dire living and working conditions they were subjected to, anarchists looked towards naturism. Thus these schools of thought, for a time, co-existed in what can be seen as part of the evolutionary process of anarchism in early-twentieth century urban Cuba.

The Two Faces of War-Time Anarchism.

Among the working class in Cuba the *dependientes* were not only important proponents of anarcho-syndicalism but also of anarcho-naturism, merging the two philosophies into a unique amalgam of collective direct action for social change with sanitary and dietary reforms for individual change [Shaffer, 1998:154]

This blending of collective struggle with individualism was heightened by the growing concern with physical and moral wellbeing in the face of the First World War. Although anarcho-naturism had begun to crystallise in Cuba around 1910, through

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[92] That non-essential and easily recognisable goods can be effectively boycotted by consumers is discussed in Chapter 5.
[93] Among brands affected were the Gener Cigarette Company [*El Dependiente*, 18/06/1913] and Solares mineral waters [24/12/1913].

such concepts as vegetarianism and hydrotherapy,[94] the attraction of alternative lifestyles grew as the apparent imperialism of the "Great War" took precedence on the world stage. Just as those economic factors that had begun to materialise prior to the war flourished during wartime, so did advancing ideas and attitudes among workers. In Cuba, naturism was one of those factors that attracted popularity very shortly after the declaration of war in Europe in August 1914, when contributors to *El Dependiente*, in particular, expressed their disgust at the conflict, maintaining that it contradicted nature and denied the human race the opportunity to live in natural harmony:

> Los anarquistas y sindicalistas protestan de ellas (guerras) por ser lo más destastroso y antihumano, y sin embargo, una parte de seres que no merecen el nombre de humanos por ser orgánicamente degenerados y relajados moralmente, los califican de asesinos y destructores de la humanidad (*Anarchists and syndicalists are against (wars) as they are devastating and anti-human, although such beings do not deserve to be called human, as they are organically degenerate and morally relaxed; they qualify as assassins and destroyers of nature*) [*El Dependiente*, 23/09/1914:1].

The condemnation of war was fierce. Already demonstrating a marrying of the moralistic position of "pure" anarchism with the practicality of anarcho-syndicalism, *El Dependiente* at once damned the instigators for their lack of moral fibre and made readers aware of the knock-on economic effects the war would have on them:

> No puede sernos indiferente al malestar que la guerra agrave, la baja de los jornales; la subida de los artículos de primer necesidad; los paros fozosos y la perspectiva del hambre, cosas son que nos han de aguijonear muy duro; debemos pues tomar parte directa y activa en lo que tan de cerca atañe ya (*We cannot be indifferent to the discomfort aggravated by the war, the fall in wages, the price rise of basic goods, unemployment and the prospect of hunger, things that have to be harshly thrust upon us; we must, therefore, take a direct and active role in what will soon concern us*) [*El Dependiente*, 12/08/1914:1].

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[94] See, for example, *La Voz del Dependiente* [30/04/1910] and Page,1952: 49

It was suggested that the workers of Cuba protest against the war, taking the line of some anarchists, such as Errico Malatesta, that war should be with the exploiters of the world and not with other (usually working-class) soldiers, who were separated only by international political boundaries.[95] As well as expressing goodwill towards other oppressed peoples, *El Dependiente* encouraged readers to respect and care for one's own body, as the perceived need for self-evaluation became part of the personal battle against war and imperialism. Thus the adherents of naturism imagined that it was an antidote to war and, while the periodical warned of the practical and moral disadvantages of the conflict in Europe, it simultaneously praised the benefits of vegetarianism, massage, sun therapy and hygiene, among other self-cleansing therapies, all of which could be studied and practised at the Pro-Vida Naturist School.[96]

Searching for a healthier and liberated society while rejecting violence and war, naturists of the period craved a morally cleansed society, free from artificial "poisons". According to the intellectual Carlos Loveira[97], abstinence from alcohol, tobacco and gambling would allow workers to channel money ordinarily spent on such vices into securing a physically healthier lifestyle. In turn an improved standard of living "le hacen más libre, más preparado para imponerse y rebelarse contra una explotación abusiva (...*makes you freer, more readily prepared to assert yourself and to rebel against an abusive exploitation*) [Loveira, Pro-Vida, March 1915]. And so naturism was fused with anarchism, and its end was to free society of the existent hierarchy and to enjoy a fuller and happy life.

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[95] Other anarchists, such as Kropoktin, supported the allies during the War, hoping to quash German militarism.
[96] *Pro-Vida* was also the name of a monthly naturist publication that ran for the duration of the War.
[97] The rail worker Carlos Loveira (1882-1928) was born in Las Villas. A socialist and novelist who wrote about divorce, administrative corruption and social conflict, Loveira enlisted in the Ejército Libertador (*Liberation* Army) during the Cuban War of Independence.

Anarcho-naturism was also an immediate response to the misery in which the *dependientes* lived, such as having to camp out in restaurants or cafés, to the lack of ventilation and the poor washing facilities available and to the punishing long days that they worked. If the body were healthier, it was reasoned, it would be more able to cope with the present drudgery. The attractiveness of the anarcho-naturism, therefore, lay in its dual-edged potential; better conditions now and preparation for a brighter future.

Such commitment to the pursuit of a healthy body, and so a healthy mind, veered towards individualistic anarchism, but workers were well aware of the need not just to care for oneself, but also to forge strong bonds with other workers through industrial unionism. The importance of forming solid working-class organisations was not a new concept in Cuba[98] and, from 1913, industrial unionism was passionately debated.

Dependientes Debate Industrial Unionism.

As the industrial unionism of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) gained strength in the USA, its ideas were being exported to other parts of the world, notably by sailors visiting Chile, Australia and New Zealand [Van der Linden, 1998:186]. The growth of huge corporations encouraged some workers to attempt to build organisations that would be more ready to challenge the new employers as, if the tyrants were ready to exploit en masse, it was reasoned, the unions must respond by incorporating all workers in any given industry. In Cuba, no industrial union was formed until the birth of the SGOIF although many in the service industry pleaded

[98] Calls for the creation of large scale unions in Cuba had been made, for example, in the following libertarian periodicals: *El Productor* [06/10/1887, 11/04/1889 and 25/04/1889]; *El Nuevo Ideal* [04/03/1899, 30/06/1899, 07/07/1899, 14/06/1900, 15/10/1900] and *Rebelión* [16/04/1910].

with readers of *El Dependiente* to help form a union that would embrace all food and drink workers in the country.

Through the periodical, workers were invited to voice their opinions as to how an all-encompassing union could benefit them in a regular feature entitled "Encuesta. ¿Deben las sociedades de Dependientes y Concineros de Hoteles, Restaurants y Fondas federarse?" [*Survey: Should the societies for Dependientes and Chefs of Hotels, Restaurants and Taverns federate?*]. Separate unions for chefs and *dependientes* had been formed late in the nineteenth century, even though they worked in the same environment. It is likely that chefs, being skilled, considered themselves to be the aristocracy of service industry workers and wished to set themselves apart from the lowlier *dependientes*, thus preserving autonomy of craft. What is more puzzling, however, is that *dependientes* who worked in restaurants, hotels and "fondas" (*small restaurants*) were detached from those employed in cafés, although it could have been thought that café workers were deemed to reside even further down the social scale. In any case, this lack of cohesion weakened the workers' cause and, in effect, led to chefs battling against *dependientes* and vice-versa, lamented Justo Velez [*El Dependiente*, 26/01/1916:1], an anarcho-syndicalist who regularly penned articles for the periodical. If waiters walked out of the workplace, for example, the chefs, not belonging to the same union, would not offer support and simply carried on with their working day, he pointed out. As the meals were still being cooked, the owner could serve customers himself or else employ others to wait the tables and the waiters' strike would certainly fail. Echoing the IWW, Velez maintained that "la injuria hecha a uno es la injuria hecha a todos" (*insult to one is insult to all*) [*El Dependiente*, 26/01/1916:1], a phrase that would later be adopted by the SGOIF.

Calls for solidarity appeared weekly, written by various author/workers, illustrating its wide appeal. It was believed that industrial unionism was a crucial step if workers were to keep up with the modern world at a time when huge industry was evolving. The Ateneo Obrero (*Workers' Association*) in Havana urged all workers in Cuba to consider building large organisations that were more able to combat the exploiters:

> Hay que organizarse, hermanos; y las organizaciones de ahora, no han de tener los estrechos moldes hasta aquí acostumbrados; hay que ampliarlas, hay que sacarlas del reducido límite del oficio, de la ocupación, del empleo parcial; se hace necesario porque las evoluciones comercio-industriales de la epoca así lo indican; agrandarlas todo lo más posible, haciéndolas industriales; hay que crear sindicatos formidables, de horizantes revolucionarios, porque las necesidades de las luchas obrero-patronales, económico-sociológico del presente, así empiezan a exigirlo (*You have to organise brothers; and the organisations of today should not be as narrow as those we have, until now, been used to; they have to widen, we must rid them of the limitations of craft, trade and part work; it has become necessary because commercial-industrial relations of the era point that way: enlarge them as much as possible, making them industrial; we have to create formidable unions, with revolutionary horizons, because the needs of the socio-economic, worker-employer struggles of today, have started to demand it*) [*El Dependiente*, 01/07/1914:1].

Craft unionism caused divisions, it was noted, while industrial unionism fomented worker solidarity and was able to deal with more grievances. Francisco Díaz[99] lamented that workers had become mere units of capitalism and that the modern proletariat was nothing more than a product of industry [*El Dependiente*, 11/08/1915:1]. For that reason, he continued, it was essential that large unions be formed so that workers would be better able to protect and defend themselves. He believed that a revolutionary period, rather than just one revolution, was needed and preparation would take place over years and must happen in many countries. The first step could now be realised through the construction of industrial unions and thus he urged all service workers to take the lead in Cuba and to form a unified front, a

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[99] Díaz also worked under the pseudonym T.A. Tizo. A Regular contributor to *El Dependiente*, he had been Secretary of the Unión de Dependientes de Cafés and was elected as a committee member several times. *El Dependiente* reported on his death on 10/01/1917.

"ramo gastrónomico" (*food and drink branch*).[100] The workers' unions had achieved nothing separately, observed Diaz, and so all existing unions should be dismantled in order to construct "un fuerte sindicato moderno con un reglamento sindicalista" (*a solid modern union with a syndicalist structure*) [*El Dependiente*, 11/08/1915:1]. Besides, workers in Cuba had little confidence in the unions already operating in the country, whereas the industrial unions of Europe and the US helped to educate workers, teaching them to fight and to recognise and practise their rights. An industrial union in Cuba would bring the worker struggle to the fore and "lo que no pueden lograr veinte lo alcanzan diez mil sin grandes esfuerzos" (*what twenty cannot achieve, ten thousand can without any great effort*).[101]

It was believed that the evolution of big business called for a positive response by producers and so unions should move with the times and "mundializarse" (*internationalise*) [*El Dependiente*, 01/07/1914]. This could be achieved through industrial organisation which was "más general, más trascendental" (*more general, more far-reaching*) and which took the new working atmosphere into consideration. In effect, the appeal of industrial unionism lay in the fact that it was a more modern approach to class struggle, an approach that must evolve in concert with the real changes taking place in industry.

The need to construct a "Federación Gastronómica" (*Food and Drink Federation)* along anarcho-syndicalist lines had been discussed in *El Dependiente* as early as 1913 [10/09/1913] and would continue to be debated until the closure of the periodical four years later. However, service industry workers never federated into one union, maybe owing to the fact that the businesses in which they worked operated on a small-scale and so the employees lacked the sufficient cohesion and

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[100] The belief that a "ramo gastrónomico" in Cuba was a necessary ingredient in the first step towards a worker revolution was repeated by the SGOIF worker-leader Paulino Diez in 1924. See Chapter 4.
[101] The ten thousand workers referred to all workers employed in the food and drink industry.

contact with one another that was necessary for such a feat to be realised. On the other hand, those responsible for producing the goods sold in such establishments, that is, beer, ice and soft drink producers, were employed in, if not vast workplaces, large factories where they had regular communication with fellow workers, facilitating in the creation of a solid union that could collectively fight for their rights in a growing industry. As the production of *El Dependiente* drew to a close,[102] the first industrial union in Cuba grew from its ashes and, in August 1917, the SGOIF was formed, a union that continued to propagate the ideas of direct action, industrial unionism and anarcho-syndicalism so favoured in the pages of *El Dependiente*.

Service industry workers were aware of ideas surrounding direct action, and although there appears to have been some adherence to the principles of the boycott, sabotage and strike, they were not regarded as practical tools in their own workaday lives. The real economic hardships and the perceived moral laxity during wartime, though, helped convince some workers of the validity of anarcho-naturism. Towards the end of the "Great War" and with the decline of *El Dependiente*, anarcho-naturism was overshadowed by the desire to form a union based along industrial lines, a desire that was strengthened by the apparent success of the Russian Revolution, an event that gave confidence to workers the world over who hoped to change society through collective action. The SGOIF sought to build worker unity, and industrial unionism was a response to a growing industrial base, and with it an expanding industrial proletariat, on the island.

Introduction to the Sindicato General de Obreros de la Industria Fabril (SGOIF)

The SGOIF was founded in Puentes Grandes in the south west of Havana City on August 1st 1917 and its periodical, *El Progreso*, went into print three years later.

[102] The last copy of *El Dependiente* held at the IISG in Amsterdam is dated 01/09/1917.

Both the union and its publication were remarkably influential among workers until 1925, the year that witnessed the arrival of the *Machadato* and the formation of both the CNOC and the PCC. For eight years, the SGOIF was at the forefront of revolutionary urban worker struggles, a position that has been summed up by Estrada:

> *El Progreso*, órgano del primer Sindicato General de Obreros de la industria fabril (sic), que tan gran influencia tuvo en el movimiento sindical de nuestro *pais* y de America Latina, y en suyo periódico, igual que en la serie de folletos que publicó, fueron dadas a conocer en forma sistemática, las *teorías* del Sindicalismo Revolucionario (El Progreso, *organ of the first General Union of the Workers of the manufacturing industry, which had such a great influence in the unionist movement in our country and in Latin America, and in whose periodical, as in the series of pamphlets*[103] *that they published, information was systematically given on the theories of Revolutionary Syndicalism*) [Estrada, 1951:23].

At its foundation, the SGOIF stated as its aim "organizar a todos los trabajadores fabriles de la Provincia" (*to organise all factory workers in the Province*) [AN, 390/11684:3], although the restriction of organising solely those workers in the Province of Havana was soon lifted to include those employed in the manufacturing industry nationwide. However, the bulk of factories were in and around the City of Havana, and Puentes Grandes was a significant base for the SGOIF, being home to the only breweries on the island, Tropical and *La Polar*, and, by extension, home to the majority of those who manned them. Throughout its existence, the address given to the authorities as the union's contact base was either in Puentes Grandes or the neighbouring *barrio* (*neighbourhood*) of El Cerro, although it appears that general meetings were ordinarily held at the more spacious Centro Oberero at Egido 2 in the City Centre.

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[103] Leaflets published by the editorial team of *El Progreso* included *El sindicalismo en Cataluña* (*Syndicalism in Catalonia*) by Angel Pestaña and *Principios, Medios y Fines del Sindicalismo Revolucionario* (*Principals, Means and Ends of Revolutionary Syndicalism*) by Salvador Segui, for example.

Set up legally through a series of letters to the Civil Governor of the Province of Havana, the union aimed to halt a system that pandered to the privileged few over the masses and to put an end to "las actuales deplorables condiciones de vida" (*the present deplorable conditions of life*) [AN, 390/11694:29] to which those workers were subject. According to SGOIF statutes, the only way to face this challenge was "mediante el esfuerzo constante y solidario de los desheredados" (*through the constant and unified force of the disinherited*) [AN, 390/11684:29].

Factory workers had organised prior to the foundation of the union, albeit on a smaller and less ambitious scale than that undertaken by the SGOIF. In January 1913, when workers at the Tropical Brewery struck for better pay and conditions, the recently formed but short lived, Comité Gestor de la Federación Nacional Obrera (*Managing Committee of the National Worker Federation*) [CGFNO] assumed the role of organiser of the strike and managed to secure support from other worker organisations around the island. Solidarity was declared by unions in Matanzas and Cárdenas and stretched as far as Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo in the east. Strike-breakers were brought in to work the Tropical factory from Tiscornia, the immigration detention centre across Havana bay, although when the cohort tried to disembark they were attacked by incensed strikers. The police retaliated by firing shots at the picketers and the new arrivals slept in the brewery, unwilling to face the angry crowd. The use of immigrants as strike-breakers, while solving the problem of finding labour to man the machinery, was most probably a ploy by the authorities and company bosses to divide the workers (strikers and immigrants) along lines of race and/or nationality. That the employment of strike-breakers had the desired divisive effect is not recorded, although workers and their families certainly were upset by the use of others to fill their positions and a protest demonstration, attended by men, women and children, roused the authorities, leading the Police and the Rural Guard

to forcibly enter places frequented by the strikers (restaurants and worker centres) and to make arrests.

The CGFNO called a meeting to discuss the possibility of calling a general strike in protest at the suppression of strikers. It was well attended, attracting those from a wide range of occupations: bakers, builders, carpenters, dock workers, tobacco workers, marble workers and jewellers, among others. The majority of those present reportedly supported the general strike, although the cigar worker and union leader, Alejandro Barreiro, opposed such action, predicting that an attempt at organising on such a large scale so soon after the foundation of the CGFNO would be a mistake and would destroy the so-called federation before it could have the opportunity to be properly established. Nevertheless, a general strike was approved with little preparation, in what can be seen as an example of spontaneous worker action (according to Cabrera, just one day had elapsed between the declaration of the strike at Tropical and the agreement to extend it to a general strike [Cabrera, 1985:148]). The authorities halted the planned action by making further arrests and the strike was always restricted to the Tropical brewery. It ultimately failed, although it continued for two weeks, employers conceding to none of the demands made. To add insult to injury, the company announced that, despite worker action, 100,000 bottles of beer had been produced during that fortnight [Cabrera, 1985:149]. The workers subsequently declared a boycott of *Tropical*, *Tívoli* and *Palatino* brands of beer (all produced at the same factory), a tool of direct action that remained so popular among factory workers and the SGOIF in particular.[104]

The downfall of the CGFNO, as prophesised by Barreiro, did occur but it made one last effort to unify workers in Cuba when, in August 1913, in the area of Ceiba, Havana, a number of factories struck for an eight-hour day, higher wages and better

[104] See chapter 5 for details on SGOIF use of the boycott.

conditions of work. The strike rapidly spread to the neighbouring *barrios* of Puentes Grandes and Palatino, reportedly attracting up to 3,500 strikers to the cause [Cabrera, 1985:146]. Tropical brewery employed strike-breakers, who had to be escorted to the factory by police, although, after strikers stoned the new recruits, they once again had to spend days in the workplace to avoid angry, and violent, strikers. The solidarity and enthusiasm that became so characteristic of the later SGOIF was demonstrated by the attitude of workers to the strike. Those who were able to do so began a collection to help financially fellow workers on industrial action and a soup kitchen was improvised at the Instructivo de la Ceiba (*Educational Centre of Ceiba*). The police, who possessed no legal warrant for such action, stormed *fondas* where strikers congregated and leaders of the Centro were detained for their part in the organisation of the strike. The centre was closed down by the authorities. In the meantime, employers at tile and brick factories, whose workers were also out on strike, asked that they be able to employ strike-breakers. The strikes had the potential to transform into a general strike but "las posibilidades de un movimiento general solidario se frustraron" (*the possibilities of a general, unified movement were frustrated*) [Cabrera, 1985:146], presumably due to the failure of the organising committee of the CGFNO to effectively manage the situation, maybe taking heed of Barreiro's warning that the Federation still was not ready to take on such a heavy organisational role.

What is evident from the strikes of 1913 is that there existed an awareness of the need to organise a growing workforce and, if the recorded figures are correct, the number employed in the manufacturing industry was already substantial.[105] That workforce had shown solidarity through initiating strike action and in the financial support displayed to fellow workers. The demands made on companies was similar to those that would be insisted upon years later by members of the SGOIF (the

[105] That is considering that 3,500 had joined the August strike.

common anarcho-syndicalist demand for the eight hour day and union recognition, in particular), and failed strikes, like those after it, led to consumer boycotts of those products made in factories that had witnessed such action. Furthermore, the strikers displayed signs of violent action, while a spontaneous general strike was favoured by many. However, the lack of an organised focal point was evident during those earlier years and, as predicted by Barreiro, the managing committee crumbled soon after the summer of 1913 and no nationwide federation then existed until 1925.

The foundation of the SGOIF and, later, the FOH must then be considered essential steps in the creation of a country-wide union, exemplified by the CNOC. The SGOIF was the first union organised along industrial lines and both the FOH and CNOC statutes mirrored those of the manufacturers' union. As illustrated, workers in Cuba had begun organising years before the creation of the SGOIF, and service industry workers had shared with factory workers the pull towards organising by industrial branches. However, the latter achieved that goal (whereas the former had not) although this happened four years after the displays of discontent, direct action and solidarity of 1913. The repressive era of the *Menocalato* had precipitated a lull in worker organisation but, as documented earlier, strike action began to recover lost ground during 1917 and the time was ripe for unifying those employed in factories of Havana.

1917 was the year when the revenue gained from sugar profits rose and when Cuba, alongside the USA, declared war (if in name only, as far as Cuba was concerned). The importance of supplying allied countries with the Cuban crop and the scarcity of sugar generally, led to its inflated price until the Dance of the Millions and the subsequent price crash in 1920. It was also the year when sugar workers unleashed a wave of protest in the campo and Menocal began his second term as Cuban president, provoking a liberal backlash and the ensuing deployment of 1,500 US

troops in the east of Cuba. Abroad, it was a tumultuous year. Beside the international conflict that had been raging for three years, the October Revolution brought the ideas of Marxism-Leninism to the political stage and, if workers did not yet fully embrace communism as an ideology, the event certainly gave food for thought to millions of workers worldwide. It was inspiring in that it illustrated that rulers could be overthrown and that some alternative were possible.

It is likely that those events of 1917 had some effect on the workers of Cuba. In addition, the US Government passed a law in December of that year that prohibited the sale and consumption of alcohol in any US state. As a result, Cuba attracted more US tourists than it previously had, many who used the island as a "playground" where they were able to enjoy the freedom of alcohol consumption and gambling. This new tourism expanded in 1919 when "fresh areas for enrichment were opened up by a tourist law enabling bets of jai-alai,[106] gambling and horse racing" [Thomas, 1998:534]. The wealth enjoyed by these travellers was in stark contrast to the pittance earned by workers in Havana, where the majority of tourists holidayed, and those employed in the service industry witnessed first hand the poor distribution of that wealth. It is also likely that the production of alcohol became more important in Cuba, as it could no longer be imported from the USA at a time when it was in such high demand. This would have given those employed in the breweries a stronger bargaining position and so the organisation of a solid union base among those workers came at a propitious time.

Manufacturing industry was experiencing a growth period during this era and new businesses selling beer were offered tax breaks in a bid to boost the industry in Cuba. As factories were being expanded or built, new technologies were introduced that would maximise output while saving on labour. As in the sugar mills, urban

[106] Jai-alai is a fast-moving ball game imported to Cuba from the Basque region of Spain.

factories turned to capital-intensive methods of production, which while not necessarily displacing all workers (the majority of who were newly employed in a nascent industry) would have left them with little control in the workplace. Indeed, one of the main complaints during strikes organised by the SGOIF was that the union was not recognised by employers: once it achieved such recognition, it could place more demands on bosses, thus gaining control.

New technologies simplified the jobs being undertaken by individual workers, who duly experienced a dilution of skills. As jobs became less difficult to master, workers could easily be replaced by other, non-skilled hands, benefiting the employers during strike action and making it easier for workers to seek employment in other areas. This increased mobility, coupled with the fact that many of Havana's factories were centred in and around Puentes Grandes, meant that inter-worker contact grew, almost definitely fomenting worker solidarity. In the factories of Havana, as elsewhere, changes in technology "acted as a powerful stimulus for a unionism designed to unite and mobilise all the workers in a particular industry" [Thorpe, Van der Linden, 1990:11]. It was under such conditions that the SGOIF was formed.

The following chapters chart the life span of the SGOIF, analysing the ideology of the union, while comparing and contrasting union rhetoric with the action of the workers themselves. The importance of organising along industrial lines and how the SGOIF managed this is then assessed. Finally, the use of direct action by members of the SGOIF is chronicled, showing how use of sabotage, strikes and boycotts spurred the *Machadato* to brutally repress the organisation.

EL PROGRESO

Periódico Semanal

ORGANO DEL SINDICATO DE LA INDUSTRIA FABRIL

AÑO V. NÚMERO 50 | HABANA, SÁBADO 20 DE DICIEMBRE DE 1924 | PRECIO: 5 CENTAVOS

Acogido a la franquicia postal e inscripto como correspondencia de segunda clase.

Progress: Weekly Periodical. Organ of the Union for Manufacturing Industry [1924, V1:1]

Chapter 3

Pie in the Sky and Pork-Chop Mentality: The Ideology of the Union and the Workers

> The ultimate was more or less what the philosophic anarchists and socialists in (the IWW) were talking about, pie in the sky, but I wanted the pork chops on the table right now. I wanted the ultimate too..." [Bird et al, 1987: 50/51].

The above admission was that of IWW member Joseph Murphy, a harvest worker in the United States. Although he understood the final aims of the worker organisers, and he had hoped that these would be eventually achieved, his personal primary goal was to secure higher wages. That bread-and–butter issues had to be won was confirmed by textile worker, Fania Steelink, also an associate of the union: "(the organisers) admitted it was a belly philosophy" [Bird et al, 1987: 172]. During a cold economic climate this "pork-chop mentality" often had to be a reality for those workers who needed to earn survival wages. The same held for Cuban workers. Comparing US and Cuban urban workers in the 1920s, Chapman observed that there were many similarities between the two groups, but he noted that there was an increased radicalism among those in urban Cuba, on the one hand, and a lower standard of living, on the other [Chapman, 1927: 587]. This chapter will concentrate on the leaders and theorists within the SGOIF, analysing the ideology that they adhered to, and on the workers who belonged to the SGOIF, examining the reasons for workers' struggles and whether they demonstrated "pork-chop mentality". Also some of those worker-leaders accused of being traitors by the union and its periodical will be documented, in order to determine why some unionists shifted from espousing anarcho-syndicalism to embracing a less radical viewpoint.

The Dual Purpose of the SGOIF – Immediate Gains and Final Emancipation

> The task of revolutionary syndicalism is two-fold: on the one hand, it conducts the daily revolutionary struggle for the economic, intellectual and moral improvement of the workers within the present social order; on the other, its principal goal is to prepare the masses for the independent administration of production and for the division and take-over of all sections of social life [Thorpe, 1989: Appendix D].

In common with anarcho-syndicalists world wide, contributors to *El Progreso* understood the need for the union to fight for gains in the present but also the importance of preparing workers for the coming revolution. This preparation would take the form of education, both through schooling and in the workplace, while meetings and vigils would bolster solidarity and class-consciousness. SGOIF statutes also recognised the importance of this duality. The belief that the struggle needed to be fought on two fronts was crucial to the union's existence. Its aim was to create branches of industrial unionism that would foment solidarity:

> ...con el fin de luchar para conseguir todas los mejoras inmediatas que sean posibles, e ir preparándonos a la obra de nuestra total emancipación, basada en la posesión de la tierra, fábricas, casas y todos los instrumentos de producción por parte de la Humanidad toda, sin exclusiones ni privilegios (*with the goal of fighting to pursue all the immediate gains possible, and to be prepared for the task of our total emancipation, based on the possession of the land, factories, homes and all the instruments of production by all Humanity, without exclusions nor privileges*) [AN 390/11684:29-36].

Immediate gains were fought for in the workplace through direct action. During the first half of the 1920s, the SGOIF staged many strikes, to which boycotts of goods from the factory where the strike had been declared often ran parallel. Members were accused of more violent direct action, however, including bomb-throwing, poisonings and murder.[107] Through strength in numbers, the union hoped to use action against employers in an attempt to secure higher wages and reduce working hours, while maintaining the allegiance of the workers who would immediately benefit

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[107] See Chapter 5.

from material advantages. One of the traits that ideologically distinguished the union from a reformist union such as the Hermandad Ferroviaria de Cuba (*Railway Brotherhood of Cuba*), say, was the rhetoric used by some SGOIF members in their conviction that the workforce could yield more than short-term gains and that total emancipation could eventually be realised:

> Es necesario, que el espíritu de lucha que anima a los militantes de nuestro gran ejército proletario, no se circunsciba solamente a las mejoras inmediatas que en el sentido económico vienen a atenuar una parte de los dolores que el presente sistema esclavizante nos produce (*It is essential that the spirit of struggle , which encourages the militants of our large proletarian army, does not confine itself to the immediate gains that in the economic sense will alleviate some of the hardships that the current enslaving society affords us*) [*El Progreso*, 1925, r: 3].

The above text has been taken from an article called "Luchar es Vivir – Decepcionismo y Perseverancia". The unnamed writer called upon readers to think not only of what could be secured in the short run, such as improved wages, better working conditions and fewer working hours, but also to attune their minds to the longer-term. Immediate benefits were important but if fought for alone would fail to free the workforce from the abuses of "el capitalismo absorbente, eficazmente ayudado por los privilegiados de la burocracia estatal" (*Tyrannical capitalism, effectively helped by the privileged of the state bureaucracy*) [*El Progreso*, 1925,r: 3]. The proletariat, the writer concluded, had to concentrate on building its strength and must be ready to crush the ever-increasing obstacles to emancipation. A contribution penned by one José Torralve asserted that in order to achieve this social and economic emancipation, the proletariat first had to come together as a social class and any ideological differences must be discarded for the sake of unity [*El Progreso*, 1924, k: 2].

Whether the rank and file aspired to a libertarian future or only to immediate gains is discussed below, although according to some writers in *El Progreso*, the masses

were unaware of the alternative social path to that which they had been following. Writing in 1924, the prominent SGOIF member José A. Iglesias, the brother of Margarito,[108] believed that the workers were ignorant of class issues and needed enlightening: "la mayoría de los obreros de Cuba no conciben que puede existir otro sistema mejor que el de ahora" (*the majority of workers in Cuba do not realise that there could exist another system better than the one we have now*) [*El Progreso*, 1924, i1: 1].

A worker in Cabaiguán, chanced upon just one page of *El Progreso*. Having previously been naïve to the principles of anarcho-syndicalism and to the work of SGOIF and *El Progreso*, the worker wrote to the paper stating "...y como yo no entiendo de esas cosas, me puse a leerlo y me llené de entusiasmo" (*and as I did not understand those things, I began to read it and I filled with enthusiasm*) [*El Progreso*, 1925, q: 4]. How many other workers existed in the same state of ignorance, asked the editorial of *El Progreso*; workers "que tienen sed de conocimientos y no encuentran la fuente?"[109] (...*who are thirsty for knowledge do not find the fountain*) [*El Progreso*, 1925,q: 4]. Readers were then urged to extend this type of contact between workers. A carefully discarded copy of revolutionary literature, in a café or on a streetcar, which might then be devoured by another worker, was the best way to disseminate propaganda, it observed. It was hoped that such action would help to ignite workers' imaginations and to entice them to take that step further in joining the unions, where the battle for final emancipation could truly be fought.

One Jorge Blau believed that the union house was the "Escuela de Rebeldías" (*School of Revolt*), a place where many rebels, both of ideas and action, had

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[108] For more information on Margarito Iglesias, see chapter 5.
[109] A play on words: "*fuente*" can be translated as either *source* or *fountain*.

matured. In his opinion, the union was "el invernadero donde se echó la semilla que ha de ser el arbusto frondoso de mañana" (*the greenhouse where one throws the seed that must be the leafy shrub of tomorrow*) [*El Progreso*, 1925, q: 4]. The union houses could act as training grounds for future revolutionaries and, through solidarity and the exchange of ideas, workers could come together to achieve freedom from tyranny. And so, they were called to those preparatory schools of revolution - invited to the bosom of the union and encouraged to attend meetings and gatherings "a deliberar nuestros asuntos, a vencer el tirano que os explota, que vive una vida regalada a cuenta de vuestros sudores y sufrimientos, riéndose de vuestros dolores" (*to discuss our affairs, to defeat the tyrant who exploits you, who lives a charmed life thanks to your sweat and suffering, laughing at your pain*) [*El Progreso*, 1924, w: 1].

In an article tracking the trajectory of the IWW, Cannon noted that the IWW leaders never failed to use strike meetings as an opportunity to inform the workers of its wider goal, which was the overthrow of capitalism [Cannon, 1971: 12]. Likewise, the SGOIF understood the need to educate workers wherever and whenever possible. It was believed to be essential that workers, once organised, take time to study that which was referred to as "the social question". It was not sufficient that they simply read *El Progreso* and pay their subscriptions as, if there were to be progress; they had to act upon their own initiative. Solidarity with other union members was an important factor and, true to anarchism, it was suggested that tolerance of other points of view be practised. Union members would not automatically be anarchistic in outlook and so anarchists were urged to take an active part in the organisations and sow ideas among them [*El Progreso*, 1925: m]. That anarchists infiltrate the unions is in keeping with Malatesta's assertion that "we anarchists should extend our activities into all organisations to preach unity among all workers, decentralisation, freedom of initiative, within the common framework of solidarity....." [Malatesta, *Pensiero e Volontá*, 16/02/1925].

If, through association, workers could achieve that level of consciousness necessary in the step towards emancipation, then, it was hoped, their children could acquire such awareness at a much earlier age, through schooling. Shaffer has observed that:

> While direct action may have led to worker initiatives in the workplace, it was anarchist educational initiatives that served to free the individual minds of children and adults to critique their surrounding and imagine a revolutionary future [Shaffer, 1998: 27].

In July 1923, the Sindicato Fabril established a new rationalist school in Puentes Grandes at the union building of La Mundial[110] [*El Progreso*, 1923, c: 1], the third school set up by workers in 1920s Cuba based on Francisco Ferrer's *Escuela Moderna.*[111] The schools covered many of the subjects studied at public institutions, but they also allowed students to explore any possible artistic side to their nature and to benefit from countryside walks and enjoy a break from the routine of the city. Science and nature were also studied and it was hoped that trips to various workplaces would help the students to consider their approaching lives as workers. Evening classes were held at the school for adults who wished to learn about hygiene and nutrition, among other subjects, while offering hope to those children who, thus far, had been neglected by public schooling [Shaffer, 1998: 266]. The school at Puentes Grandes, which relocated to the district of Cerro late in 1923, to facilitate expansion and a new library, was supported by worker dues. It is highly likely that the opportunity was taken during the evenings to awaken workers to the perceived evils of capitalism and to the need to overthrow the existing socio-political order, hardly surprising given that the schools were funded by the worker, were the brainchild of Ferrer and the initiative of the union. In short, they offered education to

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[110] La Mundial was a marble company, which employed stone masons belonging to the SGOIF.
[111] The other schools were at FOH headquarters in Central Havana and in Banes, Holguín. Another school was set up shortly afterwards in Cárdenas, Matanzas. For more information on the history of rationalist schools in Cuba see Shaffer, 1998: 250-277.

the Cuban working class while attempting to bring the revolution one step closer to realisation.

The Day to Day Running of the SGOIF – Structure, Meetings and Finance

<u>The Structure of the Union</u>**.**

> The organization of Anarcho-Syndicalism is based upon the principles of Federalism, on free combination from below upward, putting the right of self-determination of every union above everything else and recognizing only the organic agreement of all on the basis of like interests and common convictions [Rocker, 1973: 33].

Rocker wrote of the formation of anarcho-syndicalist unions that grouped together all willing craft unions into a single industrial alliance, each union simultaneously being joined to a local union dedicated to each trade. In the case of workers employed in the manufacturing industry, therefore, all bottle cleaners from one factory, say, might form a union. That particular union would then combine with workers from other factories to construct a local union of bottle cleaners. Furthermore, all bottle cleaners would be affiliated to every union in the industry and so would form a working bond with confectioners, ice-makers and dray workers, for example. Such organisation is typical of the anarcho-syndicalism that had entered existing craft unions, as happened in early twentieth century France, where established unions were penetrated by anarchists [Ridley, 1970].

The SGOIF believed that craft unionism did not provide the best way forward for workers and was convinced that the type of unionism practised in Europe could only divide the workers even further, benefiting employers more than employees. Instead they maintained that unity should be strengthened by workers forming an industrial alliance and the SGOIF was the first attempt by Cuban workers to group into industrial sections, although, as discussed in Chapter 2, the topic had been furiously

debated by hotel, restaurant and café workers in Havana throughout the 1910s. That the SGOIF strove for industrial unionism as opposed to craft unionism suggests that these workers were influenced by the IWW in the neighbouring USA, and the tactics employed and the ideology espoused by the union were indeed reminiscent of those espoused by the "One Big Union" forged by North American workers.

The IWW was set up as a response to the AFL, which operated along craft union lines and which found strength among the labour aristocracy. The AFL did not seek the affiliation of the vast number of transient workers found mostly in the west of the country nor of the immigrant workers in the east. Neither did it acknowledge the growing number of unskilled members of North America's workforce. The IWW offered those previously unorganised workers a chance to foster solidarity and to collectively fight against the oppressor, an opportunity formerly impossible. The national IWW created a union parallel to the AFL, surviving alongside it rather than attempting to place its revolutionary-minded workers into the AFL to plant fresh seeds and convert its membership to a more socialist viewpoint, as happened in France, for example [Ridley, 1970].

In Cuba, however, although some small collectives were operating, no large scale unions existed in manufacturing industry during the 1910s and so the SGOIF was not created in opposition to anything but what it labelled the tyrants: the state and, to a greater extent, the employers. The union envisaged the bosses to be the biggest threat to the happiness of the workers and as the drink companies were expanding so too did the workers need to forge closer ties in order to fight them. In its quest for immediate economic gains and final emancipation from employers, the SGOIF did not group along trade lines but depending on the product being made, that is all workers involved in the manufacture of the same product were grouped in to one industrial section, regardless of trade. By 1924, the union had attracted not solely

brewery workers but also those who worked in chocolate, biscuit, soap, wine, paper, ice and soft drink factories, among others, to become an entity truly based on industrial lines, the industry being the manufacturing sector.

From its foundation, the SGOIF had aimed to form a large industrial union. Its statutes declared that to the union "podrán pertenecer todos los individuos ... en cualquier de los establecimientos fabriles de toda la república ... sin distinción de sexos, razas o nacionalidades" (*all individuals can belong ... in any of the factories in all the republic ... regardless of sex, race or nationality*) [AN 390/11684: 29-36]. These statutes also laid out the structure of the union. Each industrial section would nominate three delegates to the Central Committee (CC) of the SGOIF which was based in Havana, usually in Puentes Grandes or Cerro. If an industrial section had more than three factories, one delegate from each factory would be nominated to the CC. The CC then nominated an organisational secretary and a financial secretary, ratified in a general assembly of union members, to oversee the general running of the union. The financial secretary was responsible for general book-keeping and in particular for ensuring that each member paid his or her dues and, in return for duties undertaken, both secretaries of the CC received a monthly salary of $75, increasing to $90 if the number of associates should exceed 2,000. The organisational secretary and the financial secretary were the only members of the SGOIF to receive a wage from the union, although delegates who lost wages due to the responsibility of his or her position were duly reimbursed through SGOIF funds.

Provincial committees were also established along identical lines to the CC in Havana; three delegates from each industrial section were nominated along with a financial secretary and an organisational secretary. Nominations for the secretaries of both the provincial and central committees were held yearly in order to facilitate some kind of rotational process, thus avoiding the control of power by a few

individuals. However, from 1921 to 1925, the Cuban-born Margarito Iglesias almost continually held either one of the secretarial positions in the CC, only conceding them while imprisoned by the authorities. The extent of Iglesias' influence over the CC is hard to determine, however, and he never penned articles for *El Progreso* under his own name, although he was certainly an anarcho-syndicalist and so distressed the government that he was finally assassinated by the *Machadato* in 1927 (see below).

Finance

Marcel Van der Linden has observed that to analyse the financial organisation of revolutionary syndicalist unions is often considered to be a crude approach, as such a study undermines the romanticism surrounding the ideology. After all, the unions were concerned with the struggle towards a better world, one unencumbered by monetary constraints. He also pointed out, however, that an analysis of the financial mechanics of a union enables us to better understand the day-to-day running of that union [Van der Linden, 1998:185] and, in any case, an organisation will struggle to operate with no capital whatsoever. The SGOIF was not coy about financial matters and it regularly encouraged those in employment to assist struggling workers, not just morally but also economically.

Collections made for striking workers were many. In 1923, the firing of workers attempting to organise at a paper mill led to a prolonged strike by workers at the mill calling for their reinstatement. On several occasions the SGOIF stressed the importance of solidarity with these workers through direct action (products from the mill were boycotted) and through collections by SGOIF members in employment, from which up to 230 workers received between $2-55 and $6-50 each at varying stages of the strike. This is just one example of financial help given to striking workers but such collections were numerous. Collections were also made in support

of imprisoned SGOIF members and their families, the most successful collection being for the men accused of poisoning bottles of the boycotted *La Polar* beer[112]. In one week alone, *El Progreso* reported that 1,421 workers had contributed to the collection, displaying tremendous and impressive solidarity [*El Progreso*, 1924, n1: 7] and that solidarity was echoed by endless demonstrations denouncing the arrests. Collections were also made for workers outside Cuba. Worker solidarity extended to Spain in 1921, for example, when 740 pesetas were sent to Barcelona to help those who had been persecuted and imprisoned by the authorities and, in the same week 1,013 pesetas went to the Spanish CNT. A "Comité Pro Presos y Perseguidos de España" (*Committee for Prisoners and the Persecuted of Spain*) was also set up and meetings were called to discuss the importance of solidarity:

> La clase trabajadora tiene que internacionalizar sus fuerzas si quiere barrer el cuerpo de parásitos que hoy lucha; cometiendo los crímenes más horrorosos por sostener los privelegios de vivir a expensas del proletariat (*The working-class has to internationalise its forces if it wants to sweep away the body of parasites that it fights today; committing ever-more horrendous crimes in order to sustain the privileges of life at the expense of the proletariat*) [*El Progreso*, 1921, g: 2].

That the importance of internationalism was understood by the union is evident from the above. However, a study of *El Progreso* reveals that, although the fate of workers outside Cuba was debated, in particular that of Spanish workers, due to the linguistic and cultural bond that existed through immigration, and of Russian workers, where the revolution had caused immense debate the world over, the periodical remained primarily concerned with domestic issues. News of strikes and boycotts, of education and meetings dominated the pages of *El Progreso* and union members were required to support financially both the periodical and the union.

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[112] See Chapter 5 for a case study of the boycott of *La Polar*.

The SGOIF expected each associate to pay a subscription of ¢40, as laid out by the statutes, and any member failing to contribute this for three consecutive months, without good reason (specifically health grounds or unemployment), would be excluded from the union. 50% of this sum found its way to the CC, where it was used for the general running of the union and its newspaper while the remainder stayed with the provincial or industrial sections to help towards their upkeep. Through membership of the SGOIF, subscription to *El Progreso* was automatic, that is payment for a worker's copy of the periodical was included in these dues. The paper certainly struggled during the first months of its existence, as, three months after its foundation in September, 1920, the editorial team felt the need to call upon readers for cash on more than one occasion. The first twelve issues had cost $1,270 to print and distribute although only $304.80 had been received as payment, the deficit being covered by dipping into SGOIF funds [*El Progreso*, 1920, e: 2]. At first glance, it could be deduced that union numbers were not as high as had been hoped, or expected, as payment for the SGOIF was included in the membership dues: few members means fewer subscriptions and consequently higher production costs. However, low membership seemed not to have been the reason for the financial hiccup. In February 1921, it was reported that, over twenty-two editions, a total of approximately 60,000 copies of *El Progreso* had been transported to the interior (*el campo*) and although each copy had cost ¢3 to produce, and the cover price to non-SGOIF members was ¢4, overall the amount received fell well short of either figure [*El Progreso,* 1921, b: 3]. More than half of Cuba's manufacturing sector was based in and around the capital: according to the Republic's 1919 Census, 3,179 workers were employed in Havana's manufacturing industry and 2,595 worked in other provinces on the island [Cuban Census, 1919: 749]. The union did not organise a closed shop and so it is unlikely that all copies distributed to the interior of the country were delivered to card-holding members, which indicates that the periodical attracted an audience of non-affiliated members. It is interesting to note that anarcho-

syndicalist ideas were being disseminated beyond the realms of urban factories, and its popularity elsewhere can be best explained by the effects of the rationalisation of some sugar mills. The restructuring of the *ingenios* was responsible for a loss of identity and control among those workers who, looking for an outlet for their discontent, were probably open to some of the solutions discussed in *El Progreso* (see Chapter 1). Initially, there was a breakdown in communication between the workers of the interior and the SGOIF as regards payment, and, one year after going to print, low receipts continued to cause problems at the newspaper [*El Progreso*, 1921, p: 1]. Eventually the situation was resolved and collections for the paper recovered the cost of production and distribution.

Union dues, then, were used to pay for the day to day running of the union and its periodical. When special projects were adopted, such as the rationalist school established at Puentes Grandes in 1923, the union called upon workers to make further contributions, (in the case of the school, a further ¢20 was sought from each associate and the amount collected was sufficient to cover rent, teaching staff and materials for the school [*El Progreso*, 1924, c1: 3]) Taking the wage offered to the secretaries of the CC as a guide ($75 monthly), it is estimated that the ¢40 subscription did not constitute a large proportion of workers' salaries, helping to attract members and thus strengthen the union.[113]

Meetings

A study of SGOIF statutes demonstrates that the union believed worker and committee communication to be tantamount to good organisation. CC delegates ordinarily met twice a month and failure to attend three consecutive meetings, without

[113] In fact, the average daily wage, according to *El Progreso*, was between $2.20 and $4 [*El Progreso*, 1924, d1: 2]. If the average worker, therefore, earned $3 a day and worked 6 days per week, a four week pay packet was $72.

justification, led to delegates being "voluntarily separated" from the union. Perhaps due to the autonomy allowed to industrial and provincial sections of the union, the statutes did not specify how many meetings should be conducted outside of the CC, although a general assembly was held every three months and extraordinary sessions could be called whenever a section demanded it or else the CC was capable of calling an extraordinary meeting when at least fifteen union members requested one. Indeed, meetings were many: in February 1925, 46 SGOIF meetings were held throughout the country, in March members attended 41 meetings and in April, 32 were recorded up to the 17th of the month [*El Progreso*, 1925, I: 4]. In addition to ordinary CC, industrial, provincial and general meetings, endless protest meetings and demonstrations were staged by SGOIF members and those sympathetic to their cause.

Protest meetings that challenged the imprisonment of the SGOIF "beer poisoners" are too numerous to count as they were held the island over and often. In 1925, meetings protested the "atrocities" committed at the sugar mills of Morón[114] [*El Progreso*, 1925, I: 4] and that same year worker demonstrations condemned the death penalty that had been re-instated by Machado[115] [*El Progeso*, 1925, n: 1]. SGOIF members were invited to attend anti-imperialist meetings and those that discussed government repression [*El Progreso*, 1925, I, 4]. Furthermore, conferences, vigils and concerts were staged as fundraising events while simultaneously acting as educational tools aimed at directing propaganda, with a view to encouraging solidarity, towards women and children in particular [*El Progreso*, 1921, f: 3 and I: 2].

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[114] For more information surrounding the sugar strikes, see chapters 1 and 5.
[115] This is one of the few recorded instances of political demands being made by the SGOIF.

Such dedication to constant communication shows that workers responded to union rhetoric. A need to discuss their plight existed along with a certain understanding that strength could be partially achieved not just through association but by openly displaying solidarity with one another, via meetings and protests. Manuel Cuervo, writing in *El Progreso* in 1925, seems to have captured this spirit:

> Los trabajadores tenemos que acostumbrarnos a discutir nuestros asuntos entre todo ... y debemos de velar porque no corran el riesgo de caer en manos de un aventurero cualquiera. Todo el poder para las asambleas, ninguno para los comités o comisiones (*We workers have to get used to discussing our affairs amongst ourselves ... and we must take care not to run the risk of falling into the hands of some adventurer. All power to meetings, none to committees or commissions*) [*El Progreso*, 1925, g:1].

The call to meetings helped the workers to forge links with each other outside of the work environment while serving to promote the SGOIF and unionism in general. As unionism grew, workers could exchange ideas and revolutionary propaganda could be further disseminated.

SGOIF's Attitude towards Communism

Mendoza Rodríguez has argued that the period from 1917 to 1925 was the least homogeneous period in the forty-five years that he had examined[116] [Mendoza Rodríguez, 1985: 182] and, in particular, he noticed that the Russian Revolution had caused divisions among the workers, two clear currents existing in Cuba during that time. While the "orthodox" anarchists denounced the Soviet revolution, the anarcho-syndicalists were more Marxist and pro-Soviet, he maintained. *Acción Consciente* was one of those he referred to as an orthodox anarchist periodical and indeed, in 1922, the publication unequivocally supported the people of Russia whilst condemning the Communist Party that had been installed there "¡Viva la Revolución

[116] He studied the period 1880-1925

Rusa! ¡Viva la Revolución Mundial! ¡Abajo el gobierno bolchevique! ¡Abajo todos los gobiernos!" (*Long live the Russian Revolution! Long live the World Revolution! Down with the bolshevik government! Down with all governments*) [*Acción Consciente*, 25/12/1922: 1].

However, that all anarcho-syndicalists and their periodicals supported the Bolsheviks is erroneous. Undoubtedly the subject provoked arguments and divisions among leftists the world over, including the anarcho-syndicalists of Cuba, although it was not the only, and by no means the main, divisive subject on the island. In *El Progreso*, the validity of the Revolution was debated during 1921 in particular, although interest in it began to wane vis-à-vis domestic issues. As it became clear that pockets of the Russian population, including workers, were being persecuted by the newly-installed government, anarchists everywhere at first questioned and then denounced the dictatorship of the proletariat. Both negative and positive opinions appeared in *El Progreso* during 1921: one J. López Chávez, a worker at the Esmeralda sugar estate, argued that for the revolution to be realised, the world needed more educators and revolutionary sparks, in short "necesitamos un Lenine (sic) adonde quiera" (*we need a Lenin in every corner*) [*El Progreso*, 1921, n: 3]. José H. Delgado believed that although the end must be anarchism, there should also exist an intermediary period, such as was happening in Russia and he urged anarchists to support all fellow workers. Eliseo Morales reasoned that, although Bolshevism had displayed faults, at least the people of Russia had achieved more than the workers of Cuba [*El Progreso*, 1921, m: 2].

Not all contributors to the periodical, however, were so tolerant of the newly established regime in Russia. One opinion in "Comentarios" condemned the authoritarianism of Bolshevik power:

> No somos partidarios de ningún gobierno, no somos bolcheviques, porque todo estado no es más que el detentador de todas las energías y de todas las iniciativas. Si en Rusía, después de hecha de la revolución, lejos de formarse un gobierno autoritario y centralista se hubiera hecho responsible de la producción y el consumo a los grandes sindicatos, probablemente hoy en aquel país no habría hambre (*We are not supporters of any government, we are not Bolsheviks, because any state is nothing more than the holder of all energies and initiatives. If in Russia, after the Revolution was achieved, instead of forming an authoritarian and centrist government, large syndicates had been responsible for production and consumption, there probably would not be hunger in that country today*) [*El Progreso*, 1921, m: 1].

The revolution was perceived by some to have been betrayed by those who had subsequently seized the country: "...realmente, hay pocas cosas malas de que el Partido Comunista, y el Gobierno que lo representa, no puedan ser acusados" (*really, there are few bad things that the Communist Party, and the Government that represents it, cannot be accused of*) [*El Progreso*, 1922, a: 2]. A plea for international support by Russian anarcho-syndicalists was published in *El Progreso*, when a letter reproduced from the Parisian *Le Libertaire* (The Libertarian) detailed what it named the economic disorganisation and the absence of political life being enforced by the dictatorship, concluding: "no repitáis nuestro error: no introduzcáis el comunismo del estado" (*do not repeat our mistake: do not introduce state communism*) [*El Progreso*, 1921, q: 1].

Others called for unity. Felipe Zapata[117] observed that divisions among the Cuban left had not previously existed: "en Cuba se ha sido siempre anarquista o no se ha sido nada que tuviera relación con la lucha del trabajo" (*in Cuba one has always been anarchist or one has been nothing in relation to the work struggle*) [*El Progreso*, 1921, k: 2]. Furthermore, whereas divisions between anarchists and socialists had damaged the working-class movement in Spain, Argentina, USA, France and Italy, he continued, "la acción social de los trabajadores conscientes de Cuba se desarrollaba al unísono con un solo frente y tendió ... a un único fin" (*The social*

[117] For more on Zapata, see below, Amarillismo

action of the aware workers of Cuba developed in unison with a single front and tended towards a single end) [*El Progreso*, 1921, k: 2]. Zapata understood that these divisions had begun to cause irreparable "canyons" in revolutionary thought:

> Es indiscutible. El alistamiento en nuestas filas de tanta gente nueva ha traído la división, tal enemistad, tal antipatía; se han relajado de tal modo los antiguos lazos afectivos; se ha corrompido hasta tal punto la antigua familiaridad revolucionaria, que da rubor, que da pena convencerse de tanta estúpida realidad ¡Cuánto se ha perdido!... Que bolchevique, que antibolchevique, que anarquista, que antianarquista... ¡Esa ... basura! (*It is without debate. The enlisting of so many new people into our ranks has brought divisions, such enmity, such antipathy; in this way the established emotional ties have become slack, and up to such a point the old revolutionary solidarity has been corrupted, which is appalling and which shamefully makes one realise the stupid truth. How much has been lost! Whether bolshevik or anti-bolshevik, whether anarchist or anti-anarchist ... All that ... is rubbish!*) [*El Progreso*, 1921, k: 2]

Zapata's pleas fell on deaf ears. Although the majority of those reports on Bolshevism published in *El Progreso* after 1921 told of the evils of the Party and of its enmity towards the workers, there was little perception of the split that was slowly evolving among the Cuban left. No national communist party existed in Cuba until 1925 and so the threat of infiltration by communists in the working-class movement and the eventual eclipse of anarchist related thought was not taken seriously. Instead, *El Progreso* concentrated on what was taking place at home, which was more tangible and recognisable: the impact of US imperialism, the formation of the FOH and the CNOC, governmental persecution and direct action. Undoubtedly, there were divisions in the Cuban labour movement, although the perceived threat came not from communists but from reformists, or those workers/leaders that did not adhere to the SGOIF, the so-called *amarillistas*.

Amarillismo: Traitors and Turncoats

> Men do not make positions; positions, contrariwise, make men [Bakunin, *L'Égalité*: 28/08/1869].

Bakunin believed that those in positions of leadership faced a certain challenge as most were inclined to alter or distort the very ideals on which the struggle to gain

command was originally based. He maintained that the reality of governance highlighted the enticement of office and what was once a fight for and with the masses no longer appeared of personal relevance to the elected president or secretary of an organisation. Leadership could only corrupt, he observed:

> Even the best of men are rendered corruptible by the temptation of power and the absence of a serious, consistent opposition..... [Bakunin, *L'Égalité:* 28/08/1869]

And, he continued:

> If there is a devil in human history, that devil is the principle of command [Bakunin, *L'Égalité*: 28/08/1869].

Anarchists denied the need for authority and so, for permanent leadership. They believed that it could only result in slavery, the corruption of the masses by a few. The very basis of anarchism propagated the freedom of the individual and any reversal of this would give way to human bondage. Anarchism, therefore, refused to be party to hierarchical structures and to rule was seen to be the antithesis of all that anarchists stood for. Writing in 1899, the Italian anarchist, Errico Malatesta, stressed this point:

> If we, in any way, dominate the lives of others and prevent them from doing what they wish to do, then for all practical purposes we cease to be anarchists [Malatesta, *La Questione Social,* 25/11/1899].

In his pamphlet *What is Anarchy?*[118], the Peruvian anarchist Manuel González Prada highlighted the belief that power is not compatible with anarchism:

> Authority leads to abuse, obedience implies subjugation, for the truly emancipated human being does not strive to dominate anyone else, and

[118] The original Spanish text, *La Anarquía*, appeared in the anarcho-syndicalist peridiocal *Los Parias* (*The Outcasts*) in Lima, Peru, in 1907.

> accepts no other authority than that of oneself over oneself [González Prada, 1972].

Therefore, in an attempt to halt this corruption of authority, leadership did not enter into anarchist thought. Each being was free to act upon his or her own will without the imposition of rules and regulations by a higher political or moral entity. Organisation should be voluntary and spontaneous and individuals should unite in order to pursue a specific goal, the life span of the group existing in tandem with the particular struggle. Once the goal had been accomplished, any hint of structure should dissolve, leaving no permanent organisation and certainly no hierarchy.

Essentially, anarcho-syndicalism agreed with this philosophy. Anarcho-syndicalism was based upon federalism, each union possessing the liberty to act upon the free will of its members. Rudolf Rocker observed that anarcho-syndicalism was:

> ...the right of self-determination of every union above everything else and recognizing only the organic agreement of all on the basis of like interests and common conviction [Rocker, 1973: 33].

Frequently, the need for communication among these many unions resulted in the creation of some point of collaboration: a central focus was often forged in order to maintain links between the various groups within the anarcho-syndicalist movement. A national federation usually acted as overseer to the organic organisations, although, at base level, the unions would preserve their autonomy.

In keeping with anarchism, anarcho-syndicalist theory valued the importance of spontaneity and spontaneous direct action was at the heart of anarcho-syndicalism. In his *Critique of Syndicalist Methods* the Italian anarchist Alfredo Bonanno here encountered a contradiction at its very root as the unions were organisations and the structure of any organisation demands leadership. Leadership and spontaneity are

incompatible, he argued, and leadership and anarchism cannot coexist. Any form of organisation requires a pyramidal structure and a force must appear at its summit and Bonanno believed that, initially anarchist or not, the person(s) at the peak of an organisation would inevitably renounce anarchism, and that the gradual shift from anarchist militant to anarcho-syndicalist to syndicalist was often very real "without (the militant) either knowing or wishing it" [Bonanno, 1998: 29]. Worker leaders who made the transition were reviled by those remaining faithful to the anarcho-syndicalist cause, and they were labelled traitors to the working-class movement.

Bakunin insisted that the masses themselves were responsible for the corruption meted out to them by their leaders as it was their ignorance that opened the door of betrayal to more intelligent, more ambitious or shrewder men and trust was often placed in men who would, reaching positions of power, be disloyal to the needs and wants of those finding themselves in the lower echelons of a given movement. The masses, therefore "create their own exploiters, their own despots, their own executioners of humanity" (Bakunin in Dolgoff, 1971:245).

This indifference, argued anarcho-syndicalists, had to be overcome and the solution was the promotion of education through meetings, the workplace and literature. Those worker leaders who had abandoned anarcho-syndicalism in favour of a less militant, purer syndicalist form of worker struggle were dubbed *amarillistas*[119] by the anarcho-syndicalist press.

Amarillismo was defined by *El Progreso* as:

> .....la violencia en plena calle que emplearán los elementos gubermentales en nombre de una minoría, de una facción de mercenarios, constituídos en agrupación enemiga de las verdaderas organizaciones proletarias [*El*

[119] The term, literally translated into English as *yellow trade unionist*, was also popular in the IWW.

Progreso, 1923, f:1] (.....*violence, in full daylight, undertaken by governmental elements in the name of a minority, of a mercenary faction, built of the enemies of true proletarian organisations).*

Writers for *El Progreso* supposed that any person employing a less revolutionary means of class struggle (than themselves) was a defector and a traitor: in short, an *amarillista*. The periodical dedicated column after column to denouncing worker leaders who chose to head unions other than the SGOIF. For this particular study I have analysed the unionist lives of four men: Hilario Alonso, Felipe Zapata, Juan Arévalo and José Bravo. They have been singled out here as they were by *El Progreso*, even though only Zapata had ever been an SGOIF member: Alonso indulged in regular literary bickering with the periodical, while Arévalo and Bravo were vilified by its writers for treachery to Cuban workers in general.

<u>Hilario Alonso: from anarcho-syndicalist to *amarillista*</u>.

Hilario Alonso was a café worker who, in the space of fifteen years journeyed from workplace agitator to admirer of President Machado, a true fall from grace in the eyes of 1920's anarcho-syndicalists.

Alonso's first appearance in the sphere of worker struggle seems to have been as Secretary for the radical Unión de Dependientes de Cafés de la Habana in 1912 [*El Dependiente*, 17/01/1912: 3]. Hilario Alonso often contributed to the pages of the weekly *El Dependiente*, urging the workers to throw off their shackles and to organise. From his position of Secretary of the Ateneo Obrero (*Workers' Cultural Centre*), he noted that "La emancipación de los trabajadores ha de ser obra de los mismos trabajadores" (*The emancipation of the workers must be the work of the workers themselves).* [*El Dependiente*, 01/07/1914, 1] Alongside this plea, the editorial team, to which Alonso contributed in no small way, urged readers to

organise on a scale large enough to combat, or at least match, the might of the huge industries employers were creating on the island and a cry for industrial unionism was issued as, in order to fight the evolution of big business, worker organisations also had to expand.

That the young Alonso was one of the most dedicated disseminators of industrial unionism is of interest here. With fellow unionist and *El Dependiente* contributor, Aquilino López, Alonso was a champion of the cause of revolutionary syndicalism in Cuba. According to other writers in *El Dependiente,* Alonso and López were inspirational, attempting to pull the Cuban proletariat out of its slumber of unconsciousness. It had been their mission to awaken that worker consciousness and writings in the periodical suggested that these two men alone, through *El Dependiente,* had actively propagated syndicalism in Cuba [*El Dependiente,* 13/10/1915: 4 and 17/12/1915:1]. In his semi-hagiographical dedication, 'Para mis queridos amigos Aquilino López e Hilario Alonso', Justo Velez wrote:

> Vosotros, como todos los grandes pensadores, habéis llegado a la conclusión de que la causa de todos los males sociales radica en el hecho de existir la explotación del hombre por el hombre (*You, like all the great thinkers, have reached the conclusion that the cause of all social ills is wrapped up in the fact that the exploitation of man by man exists*).

And, he continued:

> Sí, amigos, tened confianza en vosotros mismos; seguid predicando vuestros principios axiomáticos con la fe absoluta en vuestra razón; seguid predicando la verdad que está desprendiéndose pura de vuestros labios llegará a brillar, no lo dudéis, en todas las conciencias como sol de mediodía. (*Yes, my friends, have confidence in yourselves; keep preaching your axiomatic principles with absolute faith that you are right; carry on preaching the truth as that which flows pure from your lips will finally ignite all conscience like the mid-day sun, do not doubt that*) [*El Dependiente*, 17/12/1915: 1].

While expounding the virtues of syndicalism, the two men continually debated the viability of socialism. Regular exchanges appeared in the periodical between Alonso/López and socialists Francisco Domenech, Antonio Correa and Manuel Arbizú, among others. Comments and observations made by socialists appeared alongside those of the anarcho-syndicalists in a column that soon became known as *la Controversia Socialista-Sindicalista*. The age-old row flourished not only in print but also in open meetings held in the Havana parks and squares, and Alonso held central stage in the vast majority of these, as orator or scribe, tirelessly promulgating anarcho-syndicalism among the Cuban workers.

Throughout the 1910s, Alonso had also been a firm believer in naturism. A committee member of the Asociación Naturista de Cuba, he frequently contributed to the monthly naturist publication *Pro-Vida* and by 1918 had become the Editor. In July 1917, *Pro-Vida* published the article 'Naturismo y Anarquismo: la Verdadera Ruta del Vivir' *[Naturism and Anarchism: The True Route to Living]* by Hilario Alonso [*Pro-Vida*, 16/07/1917:6]. In this revealing piece, Alonso admitted that anarchism had evolved from its "primitive" state, as it had had to and would continue to, in order that the worker be able to digest the philosophy:

> ...pretender demostrar que el anarquismo no es más que lo que vulgarmente se conoce, es negar su valor filosófica, es empequeñecerlo. Las ideas como los individuos evolucionan y se transforman constantemente. Idea que no se transforma perece (...*to try to show that anarchism is nothing more than that which is commonly known is to deny its philosophic value, to belittle it. Ideas, like individuals, evolve and constantly change. An idea that does not change, perishes*) *[Pro-Vida*, 16/07/1917:6].

Through this statement, Alonso was perhaps seeking understanding for his own evolution from anarchist-based thought to a more reformist outlook that would be adopted by him during the 1920s. However, if he had already sensed a change of personal direction, the Cuban authorities momentarily considered him a threat. León

Primelles reported in *Crónica Cubana 1915-1918* that, according to *Pro-Vida* [30/09/1918] Alonso and López "han sido absueltos de la acusación de anarquistas" (*...have been absolved of the accusation of being anarchists*) [Primelles, 1955: 500].

A study of periodicals and other primary sources in Havana contain no later references to Alonso as an anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist. The Unión de Depedientes de Cafés (UDC), of which Alonso had been a long-standing and active member, was expelled from the Federación de Obreros de la Habana (FOH) in 1921 for refusing to support the boycott of *La Polar* brewery. The UDC and its members were shunned by fellow workers for publishing advertisements promoting *La Polar* beer in its monthly magazine *Aurora.* It appears, however, that it was not the workers *per se* who were guilty of boycott-breaking but the editorial team of *Aurora,* and the Secretary of the UDC at that time, Manuel López, assured readers of *El Progreso* that not all service workers were hostile to the boycott [*El Progreso*, 1921, u:2].

Although Alonso kept an uncharacteristically low-profile in the reformist *Aurora*, he was the Secretary of the UDC in January 1924, when his contrary behaviour finally led to his expulsion from this "radical" union [Shaffer, 1998: 184]. As far as *El Progreso* was concerned he was certainly guilty of *amarillismo* and the periodical launched countless attacks on Alonso, who was also Editor of the magazine *España Nueva,* a publication declared boycotted by *El Progreso* in 1923, also for its defiance of the *La Polar* boycott.

If any doubt fell upon the reliability of SGOIF accusations that Alonso had been disloyal to the anarcho-syndicalist cause, these reservations disappeared when, in April 1924, the strike-breaking enemy of the SGOIF, the Federación Anticlerical Cubana (FAC) was formed, with Alonso as its Secretary (see Chapter 5).

Furthermore, he was accused by the anarchist periodical *Nueva Luz* of being an employee of the Cuban government [Shaffer, 1998:184][120], referring to the fact, no doubt, that through the FAC's involvement with the government-founded Unión Nacional del Trabajo, he was seen to be instrumental in deceiving the working class.

In his 1925 book, *El Problema Social*, Alonso openly condemned anarchism: "No queremos la anarquía, porque es el desorden, la arbitrariedad y la injusticia" (*We do not want anarchism, because it is disorder, capriciousness and injustice)* [Alonso, 1925:204].

and:

> El apoliticismo obrero, proclamado por los elementos anarquistas, nativos y extranjeros, ha producido graves daños a la nacionalidad cubana (*The apolitical view of the workers, proclaimed by anarchists, native and foreign, has caused great harm to Cuban nationhood)* [Alonso, 1925:204].

Perhaps the evolutionary process that Alonso had detected in 1917 had, in him, reached its conclusion: in November 1925, he openly welcomed Machado's presidency, by which time workers had already been assassinated, exiled, imprisoned or deported by the secret police working under Machado, *La Porra*,[121] while unions had been suppressed on his orders. The UDC, however, escaped persecution and continued to function under the *Machadato*, changing its name to Unión de Empleados de Cafés in 1928.

In 1948 Hilario Alonso was still voicing his opinions to the workers when he wrote for and edited *Unidad Gastronómica, Órgano Oficial de la Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Gastronómicos y sus Conexos* (*Official Organ of the National*

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[120] These accusations appeared in *Nueva Luz* on 10/01/1924: 2 and 08/12/1924: 2.
[121] La Porra translates as *The Stick.*

Federation of Food and Connected Workers). He wrote of the history of May 1st and the continuing struggle to achieve the minimum wage for workers employed in the food sector. He most definitely did not consider himself to be an enemy of the workers; rather he believed that he had been a victim of syndicalist bullying, referring, no doubt, to the attitude of the SGOIF and the UDC towards him. The anarcho-syndicalists, he noted, would stop at nothing in order to transform any strike into a revolutionary one and those who did not agree with their tactics were labelled "*amarillistas* y traidores a la clase obrera" [Alonso, 1928:208] (*"yellow" unionists and traitors to the working class*). Perhaps in an attempt to clear his own name or maybe with true conviction, Alonso bitterly criticised such branding:

> De esa manera han podido predominar y expulsar del seno de las luchas sociales, a todos los obreros que han podido servir con honradez y buena fe, nobles propósitos y alteza de sentimientos, a los obreros cubanos, y servir a Cuba cuantas veces fuere necesario y lo exigiesen las circunstancias. A eso se debe que en Cuba no haya una verdadera organización obrera y una mejor legislación social [Alonso, 1928:208] (*By these means they have been able to dominate and to expel from the bosom of social struggles all those who could have served the Cuban workers with honour and good faith, noble intentions and grand sentiments and who could have served Cuba whenever necessary and as circumstances dictated. This is why there is not a true worker organisation and better social legislation in Cuba*).

If the above perspective was fact rather than opinion, Alonso was not the sole casualty of this browbeating. However, although some of the intentions of these anarcho-syndicalist "targets" could be considered to be in good faith, those of others seemed to be more harmful to the worker cause.

Honest Worker Leader or Government Stooge?

One career that closely followed the trajectory of that of Alonso was that of brewery worker, Felipe Zapata. In 1921 Zapata was very much a respected member of the SGOIF and, in 1921, he attended the first meetings of the FOH as SGOIF delegate.

Zapata was editor of *El Progreso* at around this time and he periodically spoke to the workers through that medium. The article "Sin pan y sin rumbo" (*Without bread and without direction)* in *El Progreso* was penned by him in 1921:

> El pueblo tiene hambre y debe comer, no hay posibildad de aplicar los métodos que sabemos eficaces sobre todos; no se nos ofrece ninguna perspctiva de alivio... Pues bien: el pueblo, debe buscar la comida donde esté y del modo que pueda. Si necesita recurrir a la fuerza, que lo evitan los únicos que tienen interés en que tal no suceda (*The people are hungry and must eat, there is no possibility of applying the methods that we know are more efficient than any other; we are offered no prospect of relief... And so: the people must seek food wherever it may be and however they can. If it is necessary to resort to force, let those who have a reason to prevent this from happening, avoid it)* [*El Progreso,* 1921, f:1]

Zapata took his role as worker educator seriously. In 1922, he was one of four men who met to discuss the role of anarchism in Cuba.[122] It seemed to them that very recently anarchism had fallen by the wayside: "El elemento anarquista disperso y decepcionado había abandonado la lucha" (*The anarchist element, torn and deceived, had abandoned the fight*) [*Acción Consciente*, 1922, b:2]. Libertarian periodicals such as *Nueva Aurora* and *Tiempos Nuevos* had survived for only a very short time (only five issues of *Tiempos Nuevos* went to print) and so the group decided that something had to be done to revive anarchism in Cuba. They founded *Regeneración* (*Regeneration*) which, shortly afterwards, was replaced by *Acción Consciente:Periódico Libertario* (*Conscious Action: Libertarian Periodical*) on 10th November 1922. In their words: "Nuestro labor... ha sido genuinamente anarquista. Nadie puede decir lo contrario [*Acción Consciente*, 1922, b:2]] (*Our work...has been genuinely anarchist. Nobody can say otherwise*). The anarchist fortnightly attempted to organise an anarchist congress, which was unsuccessful, and support for *Acción Consciente* was not enough to keep the paper afloat. The periodical was sold by only eight outlets, all in the city of Havana, and, in April 1923, this organ for anarchist

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[122] His comrades were Vicente Ferrer, Eulogio Relova and Manuel Ferro.

propaganda, financially in the red, ceased to exist after just twelve editions [*Acción Consciente*, 1923, b:4].[123]

Whether Zapata had become disillusioned completely by the failure of *Acción Consciente* to attract worker support or whether he had strategic reasons for doing so, in August 1923, he became editor of the much-reviled *Aurora*. The boycott of *La Polar* remained a point of dispute for many and the constant bickering between *El Progreso* and *Aurora* revolved around the fact that the latter had openly defied the boycott. *Aurora* was a glossy monthly whose thickness and quality of print and paper, coupled with endless advertisements for consumer products, suggests that it was a well-financed publication and it was for precisely that magazine that Zapata decided to work. Of the boycott, Zapata insisted that he had previously defended it because he had been ordered to do so, to which *El Progreso* sarcastically replied "...lógicamente, ahora lo combate porque se lo ordenan también" (*logically, he now fights it because they order him to do so as well*) [*El Progreso*, 1923, k:8].

Zapata worked at *Aurora* for two years. In August 1923, with Alonso, Zapata was instrumental in securing a dubious deal with drink suppliers, Pemartín. *Aurora* had declared a boycott against Pemartín but the boycott was called off when negotiations between Zapata, Alonso, one Guitián and the company resulted in a generous gift to the UDC's library. Señores Santamaría y Compañía, importers of Pemartín products, donated a glass book case complete with four hundred titles for use by the workers (what literature was among these titles is not known). Henceforth, the magazine urged workers to "propagar, recomendar, introducir, vender y acreditar" (*propagate, recommend, introduce sell* and *vouch for) Pemartin products in the workplace*) [*Aurora,* 1923, e:230].

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[123] The total deficit was calculated at $20.87. According to Dolgoff, *Acción Consciente* was one of those anarchist periodicals that gave way to the re-launching of ¡*Tierra*! in 1924: "The tiny, scattered papers were consolidated into one really adequate, well edited, well produced periodical" [Dolgoff, 1976 :46]

El Progreso found his behaviour both despicable and confusing. In May 1924, the paper accused Zapata, along with Alonso, Juan José Sabatés and Juan Arévalo (see below), of being involved in the Sindicato Industrial de Cuba (*Manufacturing Union of Cuba* - SIC), which, according to *El Progreso*, was a union that recruited strike-breakers at *La Polar* and was collaborating with the Compañía Cervecera Internacional, the producer of *La Polar* beer. SIC had released a manifesto discrediting "la *sin razón* del boicott a *La Polar*" (*The uselessness of the boycott of* La Polar)" [*El Progreso,* 1924, s:7], while *El Progreso* singled out each of these men and explained how they had betrayed the proletariat. Of Zapata, it said:

> ¿No fué este individuo el que mientras fue – para baldón nuestro – director de *El Progreso* con más dedicación propagó el Boycott a *La Polar* en la Habana y fuera de ella? (*Was it not this individual who while he was – to our disgrace* - editor *of El Progreso propagated the boycott of* La Polar *with the most dedication both in and outside of Havana?*) [*El Progreso*, 1924, s:7].

This perplexity may well have been justified. In July 1925, Zapata was once again ostracised, this time by colleagues at his new workplace *Aurora*. *Aurora* noted that Zapata who was "hace poco considerado compañero de clase y de causa" (*until recently considered a comrade of class and cause*) was not only an ex-anarchist and ex-member of the SGOIF but he was also a "defensor de todos los Reyes y tiranos del Planeta" (*a defender of all Kings and tyrants on the Planet*) [*Aurora*, 1925, c:633]. Why this sudden denunciation? It was no secret that Zapata had once been faithful to SGOIF tactics and indeed, he had been an anarchist. *Aurora* certainly believed in forming strong, organised unions although it was not anarchist in outlook and most likely would have disagreed with Zapata's former opinions and actions. However, if Zapata's past had been too revolutionary for some, his move towards reformism was

about to take a leap forward, when, in 1926, he became Head of Print of the supposedly pro-worker *Acción Socialista.* [124]

Like Alonso, for whose essay *El Problema Social* he supplied an introduction, Zapata had left his revolutionary days behind him, although he continued to write about worker issues for many years and, from 1948 to 1951, he recorded his memories of Cuban working-class history in *Unidad Gastronómica.*[125]

During the 1920s, both men had been subject to continuing abuse by the SGOIF organ. In fact *El Progreso* dedicated more time to throwing mud in the direction of the *amarillistas* than it did toward the bourgeoisie. In *El Progreso*, the anarcho-syndicalist José González penned what was perhaps the periodical's most scathing attack on the men, fuelling the war of words with its journalistic nemesis *Aurora* in November 1923:

> Una docena de vagos capaces de vender a la mismísima madre que les parió, y de morir de hambre en el último rincón de la ciudad antes que empuñar una herramienta y trabajar. Esos son los Zapata, los Baldó,[126] Los Alonso y otros piezas que *Aurora* cobija y alienta para que sigan su camino de corrupción, de degeneración y de miseria moral y física. Borrachos, cobardes y limosneros, no tienen en su vida una acción que los levante de la cloaca del servilismo, de la negación de hombres, de la miseria y del vicio. Toda su existencia es un estigma, todo sus días son testigos de su condición de parásitos (*A dozen idlers capable of selling the very mother that gave birth to them, and of dying of hunger in the furthest corner of the city before grasping a tool and working. These are the Zapatas, the Baldos, the Alonsos and other pawns Aurora shelters and feeds in order that they follow their path of corruption, of degeneration and of moral and physical wretchedness. Drunks, cowards and beggars, they have done nothing in their lives that raises them from the sewer of servility, from the denial of men, from poverty and vice. Their entire existence is a stigma, each of their days a witness to their parasitic condition*) [*El Progreso*, 1923, p:2].

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[124] *Acción Socialista* was a government backed reformist worker periodical.
[125] *Unidad Gastronómica*, 1948-1951. Although all editions of this magazine are held in the Instituto de Historia in Havana, most of the relevant pages have been removed.
[126] For 7 months in 1923, José A. Baldó used the pseudonym Murcio Scevola in order to contribute anonymously to a section known as "Comentarios" in *El Progreso* and "Crónicas Morrocotudas" in *El Productor Panadero*, a scam that he admitted to in *La Aurora*, 1923, f: 306.

González accused these men of being more harmful to the working class than the bourgeois press: "...ustedes dicen ser revolucionarios y amigos de los trabajadores y son lo contrario." [*El Progreso*, p:2] (*...you say that you are revolutionaries and friends of the workers and you are the opposite*). In a letter addressed to Hilario Alonso, González, a member of the SGOIF, enquired:

> ¿Ustedes volando por la organización obrera? Los Zapata, Arévalo y Cía. Es una lastima que Joseíto Bravo no estuviera aquí para que les ayudara (*You're looking after worker organisation? The Zapatas, Arévalo and Co. It's a shame that Joseíto Bravo isn't here to help you...*) [*El Progreso*, 1923, n:1].

Reformist leaders Arévalo and Bravo

José Bravo and Juan Arévalo, the *amarillistas* reproved by González, were both key figures in the Cuban labour movement. In 1918, Jose Bravo had headed the presidency of the Executive Committee of the general strike in support of Havana dock workers (see chapter 1). According to Olga Cabrera, he had also formed an emergency committee in support of striking train drivers in 1919.[127]

While leader of the cigar makers' union, la Federación de Torcedores de la Habana y Pinar del Río, Bravo attended the worker conference held in April 1920 as its delegate. Bravo was, at the time, a popular worker leader, a position bolstered by a speech he made at the 1919 May Day demonstrations at the Payret Theatre in Havana.[128] He was never an anarcho-syndicalist. In fact, the dock workers', train drivers' and cigar makers' unions were among the most reformist (and numerically strongest) of the era.

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[127] In both of these projects he worked closely with the anarcho-syndicalist printer Antonio Penichet [Cabrera, 1969:57].
[128] According to Roberto León Expósito, Bravo was the object of great applause by workers when he entered the theatre [León Expósito, 1975:333].

Bravo initially presided over the April conference, from where he attempted to promote the recently formed COPA [see Chapter 1]. Bravo aimed to persuade others at the conference to send a delegate representing Cuba to the COPA July conference in Mexico. The move was not well-received and was promptly rejected by fellow delegates, the most vociferous of whom were anarcho-syndicalists, on the grounds that it was a "yellow" AFL entity headed by Samuel Gompers who "comía con reyes y presidentes" (*ate with kings and presidents*) and "era un burgués ensoberbecido y fanfarrón" (*was a proud and flashy bourgeois*) [quoted in Tellería Toca, 1984:99-100].

Although Bravo was elected to sit on the executive committee for Havana (the committee was grouped into the six provinces of the Republic) his name cannot be found in the records of the FOH, the organisation that rose from the ashes of the April conference. Nor can any trace of him be detected in the national worker federation CNOC formed in early 1925. Stubbs has claimed that Bravo embezzled $39,000 from the tobacco workers' union and, according to León Exposito, he was later assassinated, by order of Machado, in prison on the Isle of Pines. José Bravo has not been remembered fondly, condemned in one account, along with Arévalo, as a stooge for Samuel Gompers [Estrada, 1951:25].

If Bravo has received a bad press, then Arévalo has been vilified. A Galician who arrived in Cuba in 1907, Arévalo appears to have spent his working life attempting to build bridges between the Cuban labour movement and the AFL. At the April 1920 congress, he, like Bravo, spoke up in favour of sending a Cuban delegate to the COPA congress. Editor of *Acción Socialista,* Arévalo was also one of the founders of the Federación Cubana del Trabajo (FCT) in 1927, set up with the support of the Machado government, in reaction to the workers' initiative, CNOC. The FCT was affiliated to COPA (and through it to the AFL) and was denounced by members of the

US Provisional Committee for Cuba in 1935 as "a fake labor organisation of two thousand workers, created by the dictator Machado" [Beals/Odets, 1935:8].

Arévalo continued to work in labour unions during the 1930s (when he was the General Secretary of the dock workers' union, the Federación de Bahía) and in 1937 he was connected to the Communist Party through the Partido Unión Revolucionaria. In 1946 Arévalo was expelled from the national Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC), set up in 1939 to replace CNOC, of which he had been elected organisational secretary at its foundation. According to Hugh Thomas his expulsion was the result of his role in a conspiracy hatched to exclude the communists from the CTC [Thomas, 1998:748], while Cuban historiography has recorded that Arévalo was banished from the union for initiating talks with the president of the AFL, William Green, in relation to the creation of a pan-American workers' union [IHMCRSC, b, 1985:171].

For the purpose of this study, it must be remembered that Bravo, Arévalo, and other reformist unionists such as Luis Fabregat and Francisco Carrera Justiz, were never anarcho-syndicalists and so Bonanno's observation that the journey from anarcho-syndicalism to a purer form of syndicalism is frequently a natural process cannot be applied here. These men had never purported to have anarchistic tendencies but had collaborated with politicians and employers from their early days as union leaders. Such men have been condemned by post-1959 Cuban historiographers as traitors, indeed *amarillistas*, to the workers' cause and they have been seen as guilty of colluding with the authorities to hinder worker solidarity and to quell rebellion. Likewise, they were ostracised by radical worker periodicals of the day.

On the other hand, one-time anarcho-syndicalists who turned towards a purer form of syndicalism, such as Alonso and Zapata, get no mention in the official history of the

Cuban labour movement. A study of primary sources, however, uncovers the fact that they were leading figures in the struggle for workers' rights during their lifetimes, although they were undoubtedly perceived by their contemporaries to be enemies of the approaching working-class revolution. Their refusal to support the boycott at *La Polar*, in particular, roused the emotions of the propagators of that struggle, namely the SGOIF and *El Progreso*, and the argument over the boycott appears to have been a watershed in the campaigning careers of both Zapata and Alonso. For radical elements of 1920s working life, a failure to support the boycott was synonymous with *amarillismo*. Negative treatment by the pro-boycott faction had damaged the reputations of these men and their shift to a non-anarchist stance may well have been precipitated by the hostile attitude towards them.

It could be argued that the closed shop led by the SGOIF (in the matter of the boycott) served only to alienate those who did not agree with it in principle and who otherwise had been, and could have continued to be, valuable accessories in the fight against capitalism. Certainly, the likes of Zapata and Alonso had been alienated by *El Progreso* and the potentially libellous attacks printed in the periodical read as a public display of personal vendettas and bitter arguments. Thus the term *amarillista* may have been used gratuitously, serving only to encourage the recipients to retaliate - away from their anarchist roots.

Neither Zapata nor Alonso became political leaders. All evidence points towards their continuation as union men and writers on working-class issues and, as Bonanno supposed of any anarcho-syndicalist worker leader, both dropped their anarchist-related standpoint. Other prominent union members joined political parties, such as Antonio Penichet, the anarcho-syndicalist typesetter, worker educator, printers' union president and influential FOH member, who joined the Partido Auténtico after its foundation in 1934. According to latter-day anarchist Frank Fernández, such men

were not shunned by fellow anarchists because, as mentioned above, anarchism defends the freedom to choose. Besides, argues Fernández, Penichet and others like him did not adopt extreme right-wing policies and remained faithful to their principles [Fernández, 2000:99] (apart from, it could be argued, that basic anarchist principle of the rejection of party politics).

Perhaps the label of *amarillista* should have been preserved for those who knowingly worked in collusion with elements harmful to working-class progress. Instead, 1920s anarchists appear to have rejected unnecessarily the support of honest leaders and educators who possessed genuine concerns for the physical and spiritual betterment of the workers. The elimination of choice is not compatible with anarchism: the questioning of SGOIF union action, however, was ridiculed and discouraged. Furthermore, internal bickering could only serve to hinder worker unity, a problem so often encountered among anarchists, or indeed any who envisage change.

Pork Chop Mentality? The Workers of the SGOIF

Who were the workers?

It has been widely accepted that those anarchists active in the Cuban labour movement of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were Spanish agitators. This view existed in official accounts of the day and has been reinforced by latter-day historians [Rosell, 1973: 19 and Cabrera, 1969: 49]. In 1925, the chief of police in Cuba reported that almost all SGOIF leaders were foreign radicals who were responsible for poisoning the labour movement with anarchy [AN, 390/11684: 90-94]. Speaking, in 1918, of the Cuban workforce in general, the British Vice Consul in Cuba, Drury Cowen, reported that revolutionary seeds were being sowed

by "Spanish anarchists, of whom there are believed to be many in Cuba" [FO 371/3705:2]. If a handful of Spanish anarchists were seen to be responsible for propagating anarchism among the labour force, what was the nationality of the majority of the day-to-day workers in the SGOIF?

Of the 5,774 workers employed in the island's manufacturing industry in 1919, 55% were based in and around the capital, the area from where the SGOIF attracted most of its support, and, according to the 1919 Cuban Census, 50% of all industrial workers were Spanish [Ibarra, 1992:459]. From 1921-1925, 81% of Spaniards arriving in Cuba landed in the port of Havana [Secretaria de Hacienda, 1927:5]. The 1919 Census also shows that black employees made up 11% of the manufacturing workforce, although no clue as to the geography or provenance of black workers is given. *El Progreso* makes little mention of the race or nationality of SGOIF members, all workers being equal in the eyes of the union regardless or sex, race or nationality.[129]

Although no statistics are available regarding female industrial workers in urban Cuba, it is apparent from various editions of *El Progreso* that many were employed in factories and either belonged to the SGOIF or were among those being courted constantly by the union and its periodical. Female SGOIF members could be found in those jobs that demanded dexterity, such as were employed in match, paper, chocolate, noodle and biscuit factories, among others.

Those employed in manufacturing industry, therefore, constituted male and female, black and white, Spanish and Cuban workers. In examining the radicalism of these workers, it is necessary to understand those components that may have contributed

[129] Although there was a large influx of Jamaican and Haitian immigrants during the same time period, these were mostly employed by sugar companies in rural areas. It is therefore assumed that the majority of those black workers employed in urban factories were Cuban.

to a rebellious consciousness. Estrada observed that the push towards radicalism in Cuba was fostered by an amalgam of factors: economic exploitation; lack of union rights; radical propaganda; governmental terror and the attitudes of bosses towards the workers [Estrada, 1951: 21].

Before assessing the above ingredients it is necessary to consider suffrage among SGOIF workers. The 1901 Cuban Constitution, which "contained no reference to the rights of labor" [Benjamin, 1975:69], stated that all male Cubans over the age of 21 were eligible to vote in parliamentary elections. In order that foreigners receive this privilege they had to have been resident in Cuba for five consecutive years. Only after this length of time, but not within two years of first applying for naturalisation, could a foreign individual be considered a naturalised Cuban, then receiving voting rights. Between 1921 and 1925, 624,985 people entered the port of Havana from Spain, while 466,310 Spaniards left the shores of the capital during the same time period [Secretaria de Hacienda, 1927:5]. This was a massive turnover of workers from Spain and those who did not reside in Cuba for any substantial length of time conceded the right to vote. Given these statistics, it is likely that many Spanish workers employed during the 1920s had not been naturalised.

Women enjoyed no suffrage, regardless of nationality or age. Furthermore, male suffrage was not available to those under 21 years and, through a study of *El Progreso*, it is apparent that children were employed in some urban factories, noticeably the *Ambrosia Industrial* chocolate factory [*El Progreso*, 1923: I, 2].

A great number of SGOIF members, therefore, were probably disenfranchised. Unable to air their opinions through the ballot-box, these workers may well have opted to choose alternative avenues to express feelings of discontent, and the anarcho-syndicalist SGOIF would have provided such an outlet, allowing workers to

articulate a collective voice. However, it should not be assumed that even those Cubans who were eligible to vote did indeed do so. According to 1918 British Foreign Office records, many Cuban workers chose not to exercise their electoral power, not through apathy but because the voting process was seen by that sector of society to be invalid: political parties were not particularly worker-friendly (no strong socialist party existed) and, furthermore, parties were accused of mal-administration [FO: 371/3195 and 371/3198]. Both those able and unable to vote, therefore, may have had little option but to turn to radical unions in order to find a political voice and to rally against economic and social hardship.

Radicalisation

During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Southern European workers uprooted themselves from their homeland to countries such as Brazil [Albert, 1988: 258] and Argentina [Thompson, 1984: 98], not with the intention of planting anarchism among the workers in their host countries, but in an effort to improve their personal economic, and at times social, standing. It was not an inherently radical outlook that pushed them to discover, and then to embrace, anarchism, it has been argued, but the harsh conditions that they encountered as workers in these countries, which forced them to consider alternative forms of survival, and anarcho-syndicalism was especially attractive to those immigrants who could not vote. Likewise, Spanish workers fled to Cuba in search of economic betterment [Cabrera, 1969:49]. They had already employed one survival strategy (emigration) when locating to a new country. Other strategies that may have been open to workers elsewhere were not viable in Cuba: that many were not able to vote precluded joining or voting for a socialist party (or any other, for that matter) and penny capitalism was rarely an option in a country with such a low standard of living. Anarcho-syndicalism, on the other hand, was an avenue open to all.

The vast majority of Spanish workers arriving in Cuba from 1921-1925 were considered to be unskilled hands: over that five-year period, an overwhelming 88.2% of all immigrants from Spain had been *jornaleros* (day labourers) or *labradores* (farmhands) in their native country [Secretaria de Hacienda, 1927:16]. Low skills often meant low economic benefits, reinforcing the impression that these workers did indeed travel to Cuba in order to gain a better financial foothold, with a view to returning to Spain with a greater wealth that was rarely forthcoming.

According to Ibarra, workers in urban Cuba experienced a fall in the value of real wages (annual salaries set against food prices) between 1916 and 1926 with the exception of 1922, when real wages were at a premium [Ibarra, 1992:457].[130] Established in 1917, it is likely that SGOIF was a reaction to the slump in real wages: employees became unionised in order to strengthen their bargaining positions so they could more forcibly demand a better standard of living. Furthermore, at around the same time, the domestic manufacturing sector was experiencing a period of growth, the number of industrial workers employed having risen 6-fold in twelve years.[131] This increased workforce further necessitated a central point of contact; a place where workers could meet up outside of the confines of the factory.

It should not be overlooked that the five or six thousand workers employed in the manufacturing sector did not constitute the mass of urban workers; many thousands were employed in transport, print and construction or were artisans. That is, numerically, factory workers were not the largest group of employees. It is interesting then that members of the SGOIF should have seen themselves as a major force in fighting for better conditions.

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[130] Ibarra used 1909 as the base year. The statistics consider the wages of the head of a family of four over 300 days.

[131] Comparing the 1907 and 1919 Cuban censuses, figures show that the number of workers employed in the manufacturing industry rose from 895 in 1907 to 5,774 in 1919 [Ibarra, 1992: 459 and Dirección General del Censo, 1921:749]]

That the industry had undergone expansion may be one reason for the foundation of the union, although other factors appear to have influenced its continued attraction to workers until its dissolution in 1925. Economic conditions were responsible for the lack of faith in employers and it was in 1920, when real wages slumped to a mere 44 % of their value in 1909, that the propagandist *El Progreso* was first published. Members were discontented with their meagre standard of living during 1920 and 1921, which is reflected in the great number of strikes declared throughout this period, almost all of which demanded either a rise in wages or else attempted to prevent them from being reduced further still. Strikes aiming to discourage employers from providing the barest of survival wages were staged at ice, beer and fabric factories throughout 1920 and 1921 [*El Progreso*, 1920:a, 1921, I:1 and 1921, p:1]. Even the ill-fated, long-running boycott at *La Polar* was prompted by workers' calls for fairer wages [*Aurora*, 1923, a].

El Progreso urged workers not to accept poverty wages, bemoaning the increased cost of living experienced by brewery workers, in particular. Towards the end of 1921, the periodical noted that, although the cost of living had begun to fall, employees still suffered long hours and tiredness. Beer prices had fallen and "Si la cerveza es más barata, también las materias primeras valen menos..." (*if beer is cheaper so are the primary materials worth less*) [*El Progreso*, 1921: I:1]. Workers, then, were a primary material and the SGOIF mouthpiece suggested that lower consumer prices would inevitably lead to wage cuts. For years, the SGOIF had appealed to workers by providing the means to counteract any falling standards of living. Bread-and-butter issues were tackled through union strikes and so it appears that, initially at least, membership of the union had been bolstered by cultivating a "pork-chop mentality".

However, in 1922, urban workers finally received a boost in real wages, which stretched to almost 129% of 1909 levels [Ibarra, 1992: 457]. This long-awaited increase did not slow union membership: indeed, the workers must have felt a new confidence in their efforts to raise wages and, besides, they could now better afford financially to strike or to offer support others on strike. Throughout 1923 and 1924, although workers continued to strike for better working conditions, this was not their sole demand in the face of improved economic conditions. Examining *El Progreso*, it is clear that the call for union recognition by employers had become a strong enough reason to cease work. In factories that made products as diverse as paper, matches and biscuits, workers left their posts in retaliation against the sackings of fellow employees who had been fired for belonging to the SGOIF [*El Progreso*, 1923:a and 1924:j]. This call for re-instatement served to increase union membership as unaffiliated workers confronted their bosses over the unjust treatment meted out to those who had recently joined union ranks. In opposition to company management, these ranks swelled further, bolstering union membership and enraging company administrations. Furthermore, solidarity was expressed for ousted workers not just through collections but also through sympathy strikes in other factories [*El Progreso*, 1924, v:2].

Undoubtedly, such strikes were encouraged through the SGOIF mouthpiece, which was eager to strengthen the union and to cultivate a feeling of hatred for the employer-capitalists. In a time of relative economic prosperity (as compared to 1920), it is doubtful whether propaganda alone would have sustained interest. Belonging to a union was one thing, but having the conviction that they, the workers, were important and that their demands were well-founded was entirely another. So where did the self-belief of urban workers stem from?

The Perceived Importance of Breweries in 1920's Cuba

As previously mentioned, manufacturing industry had grown throughout the 1910s and this trend continued through the 1920s. Chapman observed that, during this period, high tariffs were set by the Cuban authorities in order to protect emerging industries, in particular those industries producing beer, cement and soap[132] [Chapman, 1927:627]. This financial protection facilitated the growth of these infant industries, ensuring higher production and therefore an increased demand for producers, i.e. factory workers. Admittedly, the nascent industries were relatively unimportant to the Cuban economy, given the overall value of sugar and tobacco exports, and the country still had to import the majority of goods for domestic consumption [Chapman, 1927: 619]. However, beer must have been in especially high demand during the early days of prohibition in the neighbouring USA. Prohibition began in 1918 and the search for alcohol appears to have had a knock-on effect in Cuba: Hennessy pointed out that during the early 1920s, Havana had become a "refuge for gangsters and a paradise for whoremongers and gamblers" [Hennessy, 1988: 247]. This was a consequence of liquor laws in the United States of America, he maintained, and one that encouraged anarcho-syndicalism among the waiters and barmen on the island, the very people who had to serve the newly acquired customers. It is also likely that those employed in the beer factories of Cuba would have felt the repercussions of the prohibition laws due to the fact that beer imports no longer crossed the Florida Strait, coupled with increased demand for such products on Cuban soil.

It appears to be more than coincidence that the absence of a legal supply of alcohol in the United States came about just as the SGOIF decided that interest in anarcho-syndicalism among producers of beer, in particular, was substantial enough to

[132] Members of factories producing these products belonged to the SGOIF.

champion the creation of a worker periodical dedicated to the ideology. *El Progreso* was so convinced of the importance of beer in Cuba that, in August 1921, the SGOIF committee proclaimed that:

> "Los productos de cervecería, a pesar de ser un artículo de lujo, se ha convertido en un artículo de primera necesidad, por eso nuestra lucha interesa profundamente a la opinión pública, y todos los hombres razonables estarán de nuestra parte, sea cual fuere su profesión o posición social" (*Beer products, despite being a luxury item, have been converted into an article of primary necessity, because of this our struggle interests profoundly public opinion, and all reasonable men will be on our side, whatever their profession or social position*) [*El Progreso*, 1921, I:1]

Through such statements, the periodical helped to convince the workers that they were important to the Cuban economy, assuring them that the product they toiled daily to produce had recently been promoted to the status of a basic necessity. Boycotts were markedly popular tools of direct action among consumers of beer [see chapter 5] and were strengthened by the workers' conviction that they were justified in their struggle and by the perception that they would be fully supported by a cross-section of the population. Boycotts, however, were not popular among employers and SGOIF members were subject to increasing hostility by the authorities who used repression to silence protest.

Repression is dealt with to a greater extent in Chapter 5. SGOIF members, along with the union itself and the periodical it produced, were persecuted by the *Machadato* from 1925, the repression coming to a head in September 1925, when the union and *El Progreso* were dissolved. That the workers' cause was weakened by repression is evident in Estrada's testimony, when he documented the failure of the workers to replace those expelled, imprisoned or killed by Machado's forces:

> ...fue una carga muy pesada para nuestros débiles hombres, la mayoría no habíamos recibido integras sus lecciones y sólo teníamos sin capacidad, el valor desesperado de afrontar el terror de la machadocracia, dispuestos a

> caer en nuestra función de dirigentes de trabajadores, en aquella lucha sin cuartel contra la dictadora desaforada ... (...*it was a very heavy burden for our weak men, the majority of us had not fully incorporated its lessons and we only had the futile and desperate strength to confront the terror of the Machadocracy, prepared to fall in our role as worker leaders, in that struggle without quarter against the violent dictatorship*...) [Estrada, 1951:29].

Repression had, at times, led to an increase in solidarity among the workers, who fought to be heard and to secure what they believed to be their rights. However, the level of repression in 1925 was the final blow to the SGOIF, which had underestimated the power of the government and, throughout the life span of the SGOIF, the principal enemy was not perceived to be the state but the people who paid the wages: the bosses.

The arguments put forward in Chapter 1 regarding the effects of rationalisation on an existing workforce cannot be fully applied to urban industrial workers in Cuba. As most of the industries were new and workers had been employed in the sector for a relatively short time, a low-skill level would have sufficed in these factories. Instead, the majority of workers would have been employed as unskilled workers, and therein lay the strength of the employer over employee as the bosses attempted to ensure that industrial workers never obtained a high skill level, hoping to keep them "incultos" (*uneducated*) and "inconscientes" (*ignorant*) [Mendoza Rodríguez, 1985: 91]. The workers would have received little training and, in this respect, they were easily replaceable with the minimum of cost to the company. Aiming to hinder a growth in consciousness among workers, managers were prompted to fire those perceived to be a threat to the stability of the work place and so those vociferous in the union became the victims of sackings. However, the response to such action was not anticipated by employers, as workers demanded re-instatement and solidarity intensified. Being unskilled, the vast majority of these workers were easily able to migrate from factory to factory and from product to product while strike-breakers could, and were, employed at any time, allowing factory workers little sense

of job security or control. This mobility may well have given these employees the air of the casual worker for whom:

> There was no opportunity for long-term planning of resistance, or for building up a strike fund or a powerful trade union organization, or for engaging in time-consuming processes of mediation or arbitration. Such working conditions naturally encouraged tactics of immediate economic action against the employer [van der Linden, Thorpe, 1990: 8/9].

Factory workers in 1920's Cuba, however, did have the luxury of an established trade union, which served as a prop to those devoid of skill and already predisposed to direct action tactics, seemingly having little to forfeit. The SGOIF handed these workers a lifeline, a chance to fight for their positions and to increase prosperity. However, it must be remembered that not all workers adhered to every union whim, and many workers may have simply joined the SGOIF for the duration of a strike in the factory where they worked. Furthermore, as the jobs they were temporarily vacating often required few skills, picketing workers were always at the mercy of strike-breakers. From 1920-1925, strike-breakers were employed at beer, noodle, chocolate, biscuit and soft drink factories, usually leading to consumer boycotts of products at whichever workplace was out on strike.

The reaction of SGOIF members to employers of "miserables rompe-huelgas" (*vile strike-breakers)* [*El Progreso*, 1924: r1, 2] is interesting. From evidence gathered through the SGOIF periodical, it appears that such a manoeuvre had little effect on the morale of workers; boycotts that followed strikes continued, sometimes for years, and *El Progreso* published regular updates on those products that had been declared boycotted by the union due to the employment of strike-breakers. These calls to boycott must have been backed by the rank-and-file for such action to be so consistent and, at times, lengthy.

Violence was used against some bosses who insisted on defeating union strikes: the boss of Ambrosia Industrial was assassinated in the midst of a strike demanding union recognition and a bomb was placed at the home of the director of the boycotted *La Polar* beer, a factory that used strike-breakers through the drawn-out worker-employer clash (see Chapter 5). Whether such acts were those of individual terrorism by frustrated workers has never been proven, but it is clear that tensions ran high enough for murder to be committed in the first case and attempted in the second.

Bosses were also accused of forging divisions among wage earners, as they colluded to form parallel unions in an attempt to cajole employees into abandoning the radicalism of the SGOIF. At times, these bosses succeeded in destroying worker unity. At La Estrella biscuit company, for example, what was seen by the SGOIF as disloyalty occurred among female workers when union members wished to stage an all-out sympathy strike with Cuba Biscuit. Some workers, sceptical of such action, refused to back fellow workers at Cuba Biscuit, reluctant to endanger their own jobs for little obvious personal benefit, and the owner of the company was blamed by *El Progreso* for any confusion placed in the minds of workers.

During a strike at La Gloria chocolate factory, not all members of the work force wished to join ranks with the SGOIF and so a parallel union was founded in response to it. Set up in April 1925, the Unión de Empleados y Obreos de la Fábrica de Chocolate, Galleticas y Confituras 'La Gloria' solicited legal support, through the Ley de Asociación, with a view to convincing the SGOIF that it had to abide by national laws and could not use boycotts to threaten the stability of workers at the chocolate factory. Neither, it maintained, could it operate a closed shop.

Such instances illustrate examples of a lack of solidarity with the union and although not regular, it can be ascertained that, although strong enough to pose a real threat to both the authorities and the employers, the SGOIF did not always enjoy the support of all workers. Perhaps if the demands put forward by the union had promised material gains to potential strikers, action would have appealed to a greater number of workers. In the cases cited above, however, they acted cautiously, not wishing to sacrifice their own jobs purely to illustrate solidarity with workers whom perhaps they did not know.

However, from 1920 to 1925, the union rank-and-file generally showed tremendous support for strikes, whether it was in a bid to secure financial gains or, as was more frequent in times of relative prosperity, to demand union recognition and/or to display solidarity with others in the same industry. Although many industrial workers espoused "pork-chop mentality", in that many were desperate to raise wages in times of hardship, they also pursued moral goals, not abandoning union ranks in the event of relative financial security.

As such a large number of members were disenfranchised, being Spanish immigrants or women, and taking into consideration that many Cuban nationals were unconvinced of the validity of party politics, workers tended to substitute voting rights for an option that promised better concessions to them. Such an option was possible through the union and the SGOIF offered expression to factory workers through anarcho-syndicalism, the majority of whose members possessed a low skill base within the industry.

Low job skills precluded high wages but did not appear to diminish the notion of job worth and this feeling of usefulness was seemingly uninhibited by employer bids to deny solid training to workers. Infant domestic industries had experienced a period

of growth in the 1910s and capital continued to be injected into the manufacturing sector during the 1920s. This financial influx may have given workers the sense that they provided an important service, while prohibition laws necessitated a growth in the brewing industry in Cuba, which, in the minds of those workers, catapulted them to key producers of an "essential luxury".

Through the SGOIF, industrial workers expressed solidarity with each other, essential to the survival of the union, and many, if not all, wage earners showed considerable interest in helping their fellow workers, not only through sympathy strikes but also through financial contributions to such projects as the rationalist schools set up in and around Havana. Furthermore, frequent meetings staged by the SGOIF were well attended and members generously offered the little they were able to donate in support of striking workers and their families. *El Progreso* was also well subscribed to, indicating that workers were responsive to the anarcho-syndicalist propaganda put forward in the periodical.

The failure of anarcho-syndicalism to maintain worker interest was partly induced by the repression unleashed on the union and some of its members. Workers were little prepared to overcome the violence meted out to them, although organisational weaknesses also contributed to the downfall of the SGOIF (see Chapter 4). Those remaining in the industry during the post-purge era regained some of their confidence after the collapse of the *Machadato* in 1933, when the union was reformed, suggesting that an underlying current of discontent with employers and with the working conditions they faced continued among factory workers in the interim. Prior to the onslaught by the authorities, however, SGOIF members fought daily to improve their lot through direct action tactics, while the union continued to expand its support base, believing that industrial unionism was the form of organisation most suited to those employed in the factories of Cuba's manufacturing industry.

Chapter4

The Struggle for Industrial Unionism

Why Industrial Unionism?

> Considerando: que las Organizaciones de Oficio dividen al trabajador y lo entregan indefenso ante sus explotadores, y que las Organizaciones Industriales son el arma más eficaz que puede esgrimir el proletariado.
> Resolvemos: constituirnos en una Organización que abarque a los obreros de todos los ramos industriales, dentro de un nexo solidario ...
> (*Considering: that Craft Organisations divide workers and render them defenceless from their exploiters, and that Industrial Organisations are the most efficient arms that the proletariat can brandish.*
> *We resolve: to build ourselves an organisation that embraces workers from every industrial branch, within a mutually binding web)* [SGOIF, AN 390/11684: 29-38].

The perceived invalidity of craft unionism encouraged members of the SGOIF to espouse industrial unionism as the means to achieving immediate benefits and realising the revolution. The SGOIF believed that craft unionism was limiting and so attempted to construct the first workers' association in Cuba to be formed industrially. Craft unionism, it was believed, often operated a closed shop in the respect that only skilled artisans, for example, could join a union, which then concentrated on fomenting fraternity solely among that group.

In the USA such craft-unionism had resulted in a monopoly of workers in one union that could then establish wage levels for union associates, to the detriment of non-unionised workers [Guerin, 1998:58]. *The Industrial Worker*,[133] printed in London, accused such unions of driving down the supply of workers trained in a particular craft and so maintaining high wages for those artisans, a tactic not possible in industries where skills were limited [*The Industrial Worker*, 1914, b:1]. This labour aristocracy may have benefited members in the short term but it hindered solidarity among workers as a class, a problem that industrial unionism aimed to address by

[133] *The Industrial Worker* was also printed in Seattle, USA, on behalf of the western local of the IWW.

grouping together all workers regardless of trade or level of skill. Guerin has pointed out that, in the USA, the AFL's tendency to group workers by craft meant not only that class solidarity suffered but that employers gained strength [Guerin, 1998:59]. After all, if the workers did not communicate, while the bosses did, the latter could only become more powerful.

In the USA, some members of the IWW believed that the growth of industry was responsible for the displacement of workers who, as a direct result of large scale business, had been stripped of any skill-based employment: "Economic development has destroyed crafts and reduced nearly all workers to a dead level" [*The Industrial Worker*, 1914, b:1]. Cuban industry was indeed a growth area, if a nascent one, in urban areas. In 1899, only 53 people were recorded as working in factories [IHMCRSC, 1985, a: appendix 1], a number that had increased to a staggering 5,774 by 1919 [Cuban Census, 1919:749]. Craft unionism was not seen as a viable option in the organisation of Cuban factory workers. Firstly, skilled crafts rarely existed in the industrial sector, the majority of factory workers being employed as low-skilled and low-paid help, and so possessing no definite craft, thus negating the need for craft unionism. A lack of skills also meant that workers could easily transfer from factory to factory, and in a sense they became a "jack of all trades", able to function in various posts without the need for, or cost of, extensive training. The SGOIF understood the need to form an all-embracing union that did not deny membership to any worker and that allowed members mobility and, one supposes, a certain freedom. Industrial unionism was universal in that it had the potential to group all workers employed in manufacturing industry and in doing so, the SGOIF gave members the opportunity to overcome any feelings of unworthiness and to help build an entity that would, through sheer size, combat the increasing wealth and power of the industrialists.

Forming a solid nucleus of unionised workers would strengthen the proletariat's cause, enabling it to fully face the might of the employers, maintained those writing in *El Progreso*. Furthermore, the inability (or unwillingness) to unionise was seen to be a form of collusion with the powers-that-be:

> Cerremos las filas; ahoguemos las rencillas todas, elevemos las corazones, y agrupémonos, decididos, junto a nuestros explotadores. En épocas de paz, asociarse es un deber; hoy es un deber y una necesidad; quien lo olvida, ayuda a nuestros explotadores (*Let us close ranks; strangle all quarrels; lift our hearts, and group together, resolute, next to our exploiters. In times of peace, to organise is a duty; today it is a duty and a necessity; whoever forgets that, helps our exploiters)* [*El Progreso*, 1921, h:1].

Industrial Unionism, it was anticipated, would provide the workers with a tool with which to counteract the exploitative nature of employers who had the authority to hire and fire workers in the manufacturing sector. A lack of craftsmanship had given employers a free reign as regards payment, as minimal training ensured a surplus of factory hands and, by the laws of supply and demand, employers may have felt justified in offering near starvation wages. The anarcho-syndicalists hoped to tackle employers at base level, that is on the factory floor, and, as strength was seen to be in numbers, the union aimed to unite as many workers as possible. Once this was achieved, it was believed, the proletarian army could fully engage in revolutionary battle. The equation "workers versus employers" led industrial unionists in the USA to declare that "an injury to one is the concern of all" [*The Industrial Worker*, 1914, b: 2]. This sentiment was replicated in Cuba through *El Progreso*, which echoed the IWW in statements such as "la injuria hecha a un trabajador es la injuria hecha a todos los trabajadores" (*Insult made to one worker is an insult made to all workers*) [*El Progreso*, 1921, t:1]. This particular statement comes from an article by the strike committee in Puentes Grandes declaring support for the strikers at *La Polar*. Time and time again *El Progreso* aimed to reinforce the awareness that strength lay in unity:

> Si en los momentos actuales en que más precisamos la cohesión, permanecemos desunidos, la fiera burguesa nos acometerá para devoramos (*If today, when we most need cohesion, we remain disunited, the bourgeois monster will set upon us to devour us* [*El Progreso*, 1924, e1:7].

A more cohesive workforce would allow less room for employer manoeuvre as there would be less chance of contracting strike-breakers from among the domestic masses. On numerous occasions, strike-breakers had filled vacancies left by discontented members of the SGOIF and so, it was reasoned, more union members would facilitate in the denial of a replacement workforce so frequently used by company bosses.

Industrial unionism also aimed to halt the collusion between employers and union bosses, which, according to advocates of industrial unionism, was a frequent problem wherever craft unionism was prevalent, in particular in the USA. Guerin reported that companies often employed "business agents" from the ranks of the AFL, who concentrated on securing higher wages for union members and placating company bosses, while living well off high union subscriptions and monies obtained from employer pay-offs [Guerin, 1998:58]. The determination to end such behaviour was voiced by the IWW mouthpiece in Britain in 1914:

> Trade unionism permits of leadership – industrial unionism does not - therein lies the difference. The IWW is a fighting organisation where there is no room for leaders, "intellectuals" or "superiors" [*The Industrial Worker*, 1914, a:1].

Industrial unionism, then, aimed to block the cult of leadership and, in keeping with this, the SGOIF boasted yearly elections to enforce fairness, replacing regularly its financial and organisational secretaries. Instead of following the lead of certain individuals, industrial unionism, it was agreed, should be formed from below, that is the will of the workers should determine the path to be followed: their fate was in their own hands. From this idea grew the SGOIF's preoccupation with direct action and

education, two of the mainstays of anarcho-syndicalism. Class-consciousness was cultivated among individual workers so that, collectively, they were more equipped to challenge the destiny planned for them by bureaucrats and employers. Guerin believed that unskilled workers had the advantage of the downtrodden over artisans because, through maltreatment, "their class-consciousness often proved more advanced than that of the skilled workers" [Guerin, 1998:60]. Malatesta had already noted that "the origin and justification for authority lies in social disintegration" and observed that "the less organised we have been, the more prone are we to be imposed on by a few individuals" [Malatesta, *L'Agitazione*, 11/06/1897: 1]. The SGOIF proposed to construct a large union that would counteract such imposition and provide industrial workers with a collective voice and point of contact through which to achieve this.

Whom did the SGOIF aim to organise?[134]

> El día que logremos una organización homogénea y poderosa habremos formado el verdadero ejército combatiente por los bellos principios de la emancipación humana (*The day that we realise a homogenous and powerful organisation, we will have formed the true army, fighting for the beautiful principles of human emancipation)* [*El Progreso*, 1923, p:1].

Initially, the union recruited those who were employed in breweries, rapidly expanding to incorporate workers in soft drink and ice factories. During the early 1920s, the union's efforts to be the sole organisers of the manufacturing sector were further accomplished through the recruitment of those who helped produce a wider range of products. In its attempt to incorporate all factory workers, the union secured delegates in workplaces that may have employed only a handful of workers. From a

[134] The logistics of the SGOIF are covered in Chapter 3.

study of non-sugar producing factories in Cuba in 1925, it is apparent that many were operating on a small scale, some employing perhaps only nine or ten workers. In 1925, for example, just 357 workers were employed in 40 ice factories and flour workers totalled 72 in ten factories [Ibarra, 1992:444/45].

The SGOIF urged those workers employed in small factories to help themselves and others by affiliating to the union, as in May 1924 when *El Progreso* used its success in recruiting employees in one pasta factory to attract other pasta workers. However small or insignificant such industries seemed, it contended, it was essential that all workers unite [*El Progreso*, 1924, b: 1]. Indeed, in 1925, no more than 183 people made up the workforce in Cuba's nine pasta producing factories. Through the periodical, propaganda aimed at these workers was frequent, as was that directed at those employed in other areas where the SGOIF attempted to build upon scant victories. In particular, in 1923 and 1924, it focussed on workers employed in paper, confectionery and match factories, hoping to enlist entire workforces, as although these were relatively few in number, the union would eventually be able operate a closed shop, making it more difficult for company bosses to refuse union demands, thus securing further victories and cultivating a positive reputation for the SGOIF among workers in other, perhaps non-affiliated branches, of Cuba's manufacturing industry.

Of the workers in the above-mentioned factories recruited to the union from 1923, and those it further hoped to enlist, many were women. A campaign hoping to gain the interest of female workers led *El Progreso* to debate women's issues from 1924, a subject barely touched upon in the periodical prior to the appearance of women on SGOIF books. It could be argued that, as more women became union members, they demanded a voice through *El Progreso*, but it is equally likely that articles advocating women's rights were an attempt by the paper's editorial team to attract

women to union ranks. After all, no women appeared on the SGOIF committees and there is no record of direct female participation in the union. For the organisers then, perhaps it was sufficient that previously unorganised female workers were represented by them, as opposed to emerging unions not yet founded. In any case, articles such as *La emancipación de la mujer* [*El Progeso*, 1924, g: 4] and *Los niños y las madres* [*El Progreso*, 1924, e: 5] urged women to fight for equality in the home and in the workplace. Using the success of strikes staged at *Cuba Biscuit* and *La Ambrosia* as examples of what could be achieved, workers were encouraged to defend their rights as women and as associates, and membership of the union would help them on the path to emancipation:

> Volved hermanas por los fueros perdidos, volved sobre vuestros pasos y reclamad unidas el derecho de asociadas y el respeto a que sois acreedoras. Aún no es tarde; nosotros os apoyamos, os defendemos, y si preciso es, nos sacrificamos. (*Return sisters to lost privileges, retrace your steps and together reclaim the right of association and the respect you are worthy of. It is still not too late; we will support you, we will defend you, and if necessary, we will sacrifice ourselves)* [*El Progreso*, 1924, v:5].

Thus, female workers were offered unbounded support from male members of the SGOIF if they joined forces with them, although today the call to action seems somewhat patronising. For example, in the article mentioned above, workers at the biscuit making factory, *La Estrella,* were referred to as "compañeritas" (*little [female] comrades).* Regardless, the promise of support must have been welcome to those female workers wishing to improve their lot. Disenfranchised and with no alternative avenue, the union offered the promise of a lifeline to many of these factory workers.

Writers in *El* Progreso tended to marry traditional patriarchal views, which saw women as homemakers and raisers of children, with a progressive attitude, which viewed women as fellow workers and allies. The periodical indicated that future generations of women would benefit from the immediate education of children:

> ¡O, mujeres, en vuestras manos está la felicidad de la humana especie! ¡Tomad el libro y sed amigas, madres y maestras de vuestros hijos! (*Oh women, the happiness of human kind is in your hands! Reach for the book and be friends, mothers and teachers to your children!*) [*El Progreso*: 1924, j:4].

Women then were seen to be responsible for the education of their children and so, it was hoped, any class-consciousness absorbed by them through unionisation would be passed onto their offspring. It is evident that women did take an interest in education, as in August 1923, when female workers were dismissed from the *Vicente Real* match company for attending the opening of the rationalist school set up by the SGOIF in Puentes Grandes [*El Progreso*, 1924:d]. Goods produced by the company were immediately declared boycotted by the periodical and workers were encouraged to prevent unfair dismissals from reoccurring by becoming union members.

It appears that the SGOIF rarely missed the opportunity to draw oppressed and non-represented workers to its fold but if, at first, the union sought to dominate small-scale industries, its master plan was decidedly more ambitious. One of the first types of factories to be targeted by the union (outside of beer, soft drink and ice companies) were those producing confectionery products. 53 such factories were in operation by 1925, and although the majority of them employed few workers, the total number of employees in that particular industrial branch then numbered 1,127, a substantial figure for a single branch. The first section of the "Galleticas, Chocolates, Confituras y Similares" (*Biscuits, Chocolate, Jams and Similar Products*) industry joined the union in October 1923 and, thereafter, endless reports of strikes in associated factories and subsequent boycotts of related products were announced through *El Progreso*. The union went on to successfully recruit members in paper, match, tin can, soap and noodle factories.

If the SGOIF had aimed to organise all workers in manufacturing industry, it did not fully manage to extend its influence to those employed elsewhere, although, seemingly inspired by the inclusiveness of IWW's "one big union", the SGOIF became involved in discussions surrounding sugar workers. This is not unusual to anarcho-syndicalism, or indeed all socialist-based ideology, which is concerned with the lot of all fellow workers both nationally and internationally, but the SGOIF failed to take the organisational lead. In the midst of the threatened country-wide general strike in late 1924, sugar workers were urged by one of the future founders of the PCC, Alejandro Barreiro, to organise along libertarian lines. Quoting Bakunin and praising the principles of anarcho-communism, Barreiro also foresaw the need to expand propaganda to areas outside of Havana and to create an industrial branch of sugar workers [*El Progreso*, 1924, I1:2]. The ideas of the SGOIF enjoyed a following among these workers and thousands of editions of *El Progreso*, in which letters and articles written by sugar workers were published, had been sold in rural areas since its foundation.

The inclusion of sugar workers would have been a natural progression for the SGOIF as many toiled in conditions akin to those in urban factories and were unskilled hands, victims of long hours in return for meagre wages. Work on sugar plantations and in the mills was seasonal and so, many hands were used as casual labour, employed only during harvest time, usually from January to June, precisely the type of itinerant workers represented by the industrial unionists in the USA. In addition, a high percentage of sugar mills had been subject to increased rationalisation and so workers had experienced a dilution of skills, a situation that should have spurred industrial unionists to recruit among the ranks of sugar workers. In Cuba, rationalisation did increase tension among sugar workers, heightened by the fact that some companies had given more power to the management and so bosses had gained fuller control over the workers. During the post-Great War period, "corporate

reformers set about revamping the sugar mills management, production and labor systems" [O'Brien, 1996:215] and this acted as a catalyst for increased radicalism among workers employed there. Included were demands by sugar workers for more worker control in the workplace, inasmuch as they called for the right to associate and to exercise a say in how factories were run, including more influence in determining who should be employed and under what conditions.

Writers in *El Progreso* were aware of the great unionising potential in sugar industry and regularly encouraged workers to form a solid association. They noted the vast "ejércitos de parias" (*armies of pariahs*) [*El Progreso*, 1923, s:1], namely those Jamaican and Haitian immigrants who had been imported to Cuba as cheap labour and who, in the view of company management, were not predisposed to confrontation. However, observed the periodical, low wages, long hours and insults had bred discontent among the many West Indian labourers and factory hands and, it maintained, this discontent must be built upon:

> ... no debe despreciarse el movimiento que se ha iniciado, pues, tal vez, por medio de él, pudieran llegar a mejorar en mucho los jornales de la zafra, y tal vez, a establecer la jornada de ocho horas en los ingenios, una de las más urgentes necesidades de la lucha obrera en Cuba (*the movement that has been started must not wane, as, perhaps, through it, wages earned during the harvest will be able to increase drastically, and perhaps, the eight-hour day in the sugar mills, one of the most urgent needs of the Cuban labour struggle, will be established*) [*El Progreso*, 1923, s:1].

Throughout 1924 and 1925, the periodical frequently publicised the many strikes declared in sugar mills and plantations in those years, whilst offering support through meetings and propaganda.[135] Through *El Progreso*, the SGOIF helped to raise the class-consciousness already in evidence in the *campo*, although the union did not attempt to unionise these workers even though, on more than one occasion, one worker organiser in Las Tunas in the Oriente Province, Jose María Soler, pleaded for

[135] Sugar strikes in 1924 are discussed in chapter 5.

assistance. In an article printed in both the anarchist fortnightly *El Sembrador* (*The Sower*), and *El Progreso,* María Soler called for support from the experienced organisers in and around the Capital:

> En el campo hay obreros conscientes que desean organizarse, y es necesario pensar que no solo en La Habana debe de haber gremios y Federaciones ..... Los obreros del interior pedimos un poco más de acción por parte vuestra" (*In the country, there are conscious workers who want to organise themselves, and it is necessary that unions and Federations exist not solely in Havana ...We, the workers of the interior, ask for a little more action on your part*) [*El Progreso*, 1924:o].

The country-side, then, was ripe for organisation; so why did the SGOIF fail to take the opportunity to promote both industrial unionism and anarcho-syndicalism throughout the region? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to consider the role of the FOH and the CNOC in the Cuban labour movement and how significant a role the SGOIF played in the movement as a whole.

The SGOIF in a Wider Context – Its Relationship with the FOH and CNOC

As earlier discussed, the first FOH Congress of May 1922 revealed a decidedly anarcho-syndicalist hue. The Congress agreed to forge a unified proletarian front that would build worker resistance and act as educator, while embracing class struggle and direct action and rejecting electoral action. The paper that resulted from the Congress echoed resolutions passed in the preamble and statutes of the SGOIF, such as the right of each union to retain autonomy and liberty, along with those listed above. The SGOIF was one of the founding members of the FOH and would continue to play a role in it until closed by Machado's forces in September 1925. A study of financial contributions to the FOH reveals that SGOIF membership to the FOH was economically essential to the very survival of the Federation. According to FOH records, from October 1923 to December 1924, some 26% of all per capita contributions to the FOH was by provided by SGOIF members, who were around

1,500 strong in the local federation [AN 383/11540: 34].[136] It may have been assumed by the SGOIF that such a hefty donation, together with the large membership subscription, afforded the union a voice in the recently formed FOH, although, in keeping with the Federation's statutes, only one vote could be cast by the SGOIF in any election or resolution, regardless of membership numbers. Indeed, the SGOIF did attempt to exert its influence on the FOH on more than one occasion and tempers often ran high between SGOIF delegates and the FOH's Central Committee.

One vociferous member of the SGOIF, Paulino Diez Martín, who had been active in anarchist circles in Spain, regularly opposed what he saw as the centralist workings of the FOH Central Committee. In 1923, he had been nominated Secretary General of the anarchist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT – *National Confederation of Workers*) in Spain and arrived in Cuba in July 1924, fleeing government repression after a period of imprisonment, having been accused of plotting against the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. Very soon after his arrival in Cuba, Diez began employment as a brewery worker and almost immediately became a prominent figure in the SGOIF and, in September 1924, he urged workers to unite along anarcho-syndicalist lines through *¡Tierra!*. He claimed that, unless the FOH altered its organisational structure, it was doomed to failure, as the structure that it had did not respond to the needs of the workers:

> El único terreno apto para la armonía de todos los esfuerzos, de todas las actividades y las individualidades y apto también para la lucha es el del Sindicato Ramo (*The only sphere suited to the harmony of all efforts, of all activities and individualities and suited too to the struggle, is that of the Industrial Branch*) [¡*Tierra!* 25/09/1924:1].

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[136] In the 15-month time period, SGOIF per capita contributions totalled $1134 (Cuban pesos) of a total of $4292. $1134 averaged among fifteen months is $75.6 [AN 383/11540:34]. The monthly subscription to the FOH was ¢5, giving the figure 1,512 SGOIF members (own calculations).

That both the FOH and the CNOC did not organise industrially was a bone of contention for Diez, who often entered into bitter quarrels with the Central Committee, and with its then Secretary Alfredo López, in particular. When confronted by Diez, who asked why the CNOC had failed to organise according to industry, López replied that such organisation was extremely difficult, considering that at that time few local federations or industrial branches existed in Cuba. Individual branches would first need to be founded in order that the national confederation could follow suit, he contended [IHMCRSC, b, 1985: 417].

Tensions among the two men were heightened when, in late 1924, sugar workers struck country-wide for union recognition, higher wages and shorter hours. By early October 1924, sugar strikers in Cruces had already won some concessions, and workers in Morón, Camagüey, followed their lead in trying to secure the right to organise and receive better conditions. In light of these events, the FOH aimed to orchestrate a propaganda drive that would rally workers into solidarity strikes, but elements in the SGOIF did not agree with the campaign. In an article entitled *Dictadura Federal (Federal Dictatorship)*, Diez accused the FOH of not responding to the wishes of all members:

> El Pleno de la Federación Obrera es un incubo de dictadorzuelos, para los que la Ibertad (*sic*) es algo metafísico o imaginario. Digo esto porque la Federación ha negado al Sindicato Fabril el derecho de discutir su actuación, a formular proposiciones en oposición a un programa de escursión de propaganda por la Isla presentado por ella [*The Assembly of the Worker Federation is an incubus of little dictators, for whom liberty is something metaphysical or imaginary. I say this because the Federation has denied the Sindicato Fabril the right to discuss its role, in making proposals in opposition to the propaganda excursion programme of the Island put forward by (the FOH)*] (*El Progreso*, 1924, I1:1).

Diez so vehemently opposed the propaganda campaign because it was due to take place at the same time as the country's presidential elections. It was an inopportune moment for such a tour, in which all efforts would be wasted and anyhow, he argued,

the FOH had not formed a structured response to the strikes and was in a state of disorganisation. Diez pleaded that, before the tour was embarked upon, an extraordinary meeting be called to discuss the matter further. The reason for his outburst also involved a request by the Federation to the SGOIF for $700 in order to realise the project. According to Diez the FOH exercised a "centralización odiosa" (*hateful centralisation*) over its associates and it had:

> ... un programa cerrado, somete a conocimiento, no a la aprobación de los Sindicatos. De antemano se fija a cada Sindicato conque debe contribuir a tal fin. (... *a closed programme, subject to information, not to the consent of the unions. It fixes, in advance, the amount each union must contribute to such ends*) [*El Progreso*, 1924, I1:1].

The union had a right to know how the money was to be spent and to propose modifications to FOH plans, Diez contended. Despite his efforts, Diez did not possess the backing of the majority of the SGOIF, whose members held a meeting to discuss the matter, the results of which were published in *El Progreso*. The SGOIF distanced itself from Diez's ravings, reporting that the General Assembly had indeed agreed to foot the amount requested by the FOH with a view to organising Cuban workers [*El Progreso*, 1924:n1:1].

Alfredo López and Peña Vilaboa had responded to Diez's observations through a signed flyer, circulated in Havana, in which they were uncomplimentary toward Diez and his criticisms of the FOH. However, observed one worker calling himself "Universo", Diez, as an anarchist, had every right to criticise, as:

> "La crítica – en nuestro concepto – es la depuración del pensamiento humano y gracias a ella es que las cosas van hacia la perfección (*Criticism – in our opinion – is the purification of human thought and thanks to it things become closer to perfection*) [*El Progreso*, 1924:n1:1].

That such views did exist among other union members may have prevented the SGOIF from expelling Diez, or maybe he was given another chance due to his reputation as a powerful and competent worker organiser in the CNT. In any case, when the FOH rejected Diez as SGOIF delegate, the union stood by him, insisting that he continue to serve on the Comité Pleno (*Plenary Committee*) of the FOH, a stance that caused the Federation to revoke the demand for his removal. Diez continued to voice concern about the workings of the FOH, accusing it of failing to organise sugar workers and of causing confusion surrounding the threatened general strike and, in his dismay, he proposed a solution. Having accepted the responsibility of drawing up new regulations for the SGOIF, Diez and one Rafael R. González suggested that the reform build upon the industrial unionism already practised by the SGOIF. The new entity, to be named Sindicato del Ramo de la Alimentación y sus Anexos de la Habana y su Radio (*The Union Branch for Food and Related Products of Havana and its Radius*), aspired to anarcho-communism and would embrace all workers concerned with the production of food and drink, including sugar workers, the new Comisión de Reforma del Reglamento (*Commission for the Reform of the Regulations*) proposed. Cuban sugar workers had never been federated into one union, which prevented solidarity and, as far as the anarcho-syndicalists were concerned, weakened strike action. The proposal was never accepted, but what is interesting is the realisation by Diez that sugar workers needed to belong to a strong union and his belief that the SGOIF could, in part, be responsible for their organisation. He was undoubtedly disillusioned by the FOH and their attempts at centralisation, and he aimed to promote anarcho-syndicalism through the island while it was still the most popular radical thought in Cuba. Having very recently arrived from Europe, he must have been aware of the centralising tendencies of communism and its threat to anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism.

The general strike in support of sugar workers nation-wide was never realised and Diez placed the blame at the feet of the FOH. That the strike had been "una derrota para el proletariado entero de Cuba" (*a defeat for the entire proletariat of Cuba*) was neither the fault of the sugar workers nor the leaders of the strike but of the organisers of the general strike in Havana, that is the FOH, maintained Diez [*El Progreso*, 1924, v1:1]. The FOH Comité Conjunto de Huelga (CC) (*Joint Strike Committee*), he continued:

> ...es el responsable del fracaso, con sus aplazamientos incesantes y la verborrea ridícula y fantasmagórica por él empleado (*is the one responsible for the failure, with its incessant postponements and the ridiculous and phantasmagorical torrent of words employed by it)* [*El Progreso*, 1924: v1]

The cowardliness, passivity and insensitivity displayed by the FOH had undermined the commitment and bravery on the part of the workers, he persisted, and, instead of the continued threat of action, the strike committee should have acted sooner and declared a general strike when the country was poised and hungry for such action. The FOH denied responsibility for the failure and appeared to resent SGOIF criticism. In a previous meeting called to discuss the approaching general strike, the CC had been convinced by Alfredo López (according to Diez) that the SGOIF was an irregular organisation, given that five of its members sat on the strike committee, while other unions posted just one delegate. Two delegates were duly expelled from the CC, an injustice, complained Diez, taking into account that only one joint vote was apportioned to the five members. Furthermore, Diez was convinced that the representatives from the *campo* "perversamente han sido inducidas a manifestar su hostilidad al Sindicato Fabril" (*have been perversely induced to show their hostility to the Manufacturers' Union*) [*El Progreso*, 1924, v1:1]. He further contended that it was not the role of the CC to dictate to a congress, but instead that the organisations themselves should propose any congress agenda.

The general strike had been called for 14th December, although the organisers of the sugar strikes reached an agreement with the authorities two days before the set date. An Asamblea-Congreso (*Congress Meeting*) was held on 14th December, in what was to be the first step in creating a national worker federation, soon to be known as the CNOC. The meeting was spontaneous in nature and so no agenda had been drawn up. How then, enquired the SGOIF, could delegates truly represent their organisations if the points of the meeting could not be discussed beforehand? The union argued that, instead of taking into consideration the views of the majority of its members, delegates would be merely expressing their own opinions. Thus, the SGOIF drafted a proposal, stating that, in future, an agenda should be set out and agreed in advance of any national congress and that the recent failure of the general strike should be examined and solutions reached as to how to avoid further such catastrophes. The proposal was read out to the delegates and the reception was unfavourable. Lopéz "gritó estentóreamente: '¡Esto es un boletón a las Delegaciones del Congreso!" (*shouted in a stentorian voice 'This is a shoddy ballot for the Delegations in the Congress)* [*El Progreso*, 1924, v1: 1], to which SGOIF delegates took offence and drafted a reply, condemning what they saw as hostility directed towards their delegation. They maintained that they were entitled to voice to the Congress the opinions of SGOIF members. As true anarcho-syndicalists, the three delegates (Rafael Serra, Paulino Diez and Amadeo Pérez)[137] emphasised their discontent through direct action:

> ...presentamos al Congreso nuestra retirada del mismo, aclarando que comprendemos la razón de los Delegados del Interior al verse defraudados en los propósitos que traían, pero esta Delegación aclara que ella no es culpable de que no haya habido el verdadero y necesario orden y puntualización al citar a este Congreso Nacional (*We present to the Congress our withdrawal from it, making it clear that we understand the reasoning of the*

[137] Rafael Serra Marrero was a black Cuban who had previously been a tobacco worker and was known by the authorities as a "consciente y viejo anarquista" (*politically aware and long-standing anarchist*) [FOH, 88-90]. Amadeo Pérez was a Spaniard expelled from Cuba by Machado in August 1925 [Paláez Groba, 1991: 90]

> *Delegates from outside of Havana, on being robbed of their purpose for attending, but this Delegation makes it clear that is does not bear responsibility for the fact that that the true and necessary agenda and specifications were not present at this National Congress*) [*El Progreso,* 1924:v1].

Through the periodical, the delegation explained publicly its reasons for withdrawing from the Congress, although the consequences of the trio's actions tarnished the reputation of the SGOIF among fellow workers:

> Sabemos que al retirarse la Delegación del Sindicato del Congreso, se denostó a nuestra colectividad por algunos compañeros, que consideramos buenos, y por otros que son de muy poca solvencia moral [*We know that by withdrawing the Union Delegation from the Congress, our collective was insulted by some comrades, who we thought were good, and by others who have very little character)* [*El Progreso*, 1924, v1: 1].

Through questioning both the FOH's handling of the general strike and the organisation of the national congress, the SGOIF had partly alienated itself from other unions in Cuba. What may have been an effort to discredit the FOH had actually backfired and, instead, the credibility enjoyed by the SGOIF had suffered, especially in the eyes of the sugar workers, precisely one of the groups that Diez had planned to embrace in his aborted plans for a larger union. However, whether through strong convictions or stubbornness, the SGOIF could not be silenced, even though hostilities were exchanged between the FOH and Diez, who was labelled a traitor and a parasite by the local federation [*El Progreso*, 1924: w1:3].

In February 1925, at the Second National Worker Congress (SCON), Diez and Serra once again represented the SGOIF, indicating that they enjoyed the backing of the majority of union members and proving that their outburst at the previous meeting had not led to expulsion from the FOH. On the contrary, both men were nominated to the Comisión Dictaminadora (*Consultation Commission*), which was responsible for organisation and education, two issues close to the hearts of the SGOIF delegates. The Congress passed a resolution to work towards freeing Arias, Rivera

and Quirós, the SGOIF members accused of causing death by poisoning (see chapter 5). The delegation, however, still had a grievance. When a resolution from the December Congress was read out for ratification, Diez and Serra complained that they considered two phrases to be offensive and asked that they be duly removed,[138] to which López replied that the resolution simply relayed what had been discussed previously. Once again, the SGOIF delegation asked that a motion proposed by them be read to the Congress, although, after having read the motion, López decided that it in turn was offensive, an opinion that was not shared by all present:

> ... las opiniones de los delegados se dividen, pues mientras que unos opinan que en la Moción no hay ofensas, otros creen que sí, siendo esto motivo de largos y acalorados debates por espacio de dos horas (*the opinions of the delegates are divided, as while some believe that the motion is not offensive, others believe that it is, this being the motive for long and heated two-hour discussions*) [Tellería Toca, 1984:124]

The debate, in fact, became so heated that the session was suspended until the following day. Although the phrases considered offensive were not omitted from the resolution, the SGOIF had once again upset the otherwise smooth running of the Congress. Later in the Congress, both Serra and Diez spoke at length about the organisational direction the CNOC should follow in order that it be successful, a direction presumably based along anarcho-syndicalist lines.

When the CNOC was formally set up in August, the body agreed to fight class struggle through direct action, while collectively rejecting electoral action, like the SGOIF and FOH before it. As Tellería Toca observed "como era de esperarse, la idea anarcosindicalista fue la dominante" (*as was expected, anarcho-syndicalism was the dominant idea*) [Tellería Toca, 1973:158]. Serra and Diez were once again put forward as SGOIF delegates to this Congress, now accompanied by Angel Arias, who had recently been released from prison and who, having been so intimately

[138] It is unclear exactly what had caused the SGOIF to complain.

involved in the boycott of *La Polar*, addressed other delegates regarding the problems often encountered when a product was boycotted. The Congress resolved to intensify the long-running boycott of *La Polar* along with those of eight cigar brands.

All three SGOIF delegates spoke at the closing meeting of the Congress on 7th August alongside the tobacco worker Juana María Acosta[139] and the printers Alfredo López and Antonio Penichet. Despite previous run-ins with López, Diez worked side by side with him throughout this congress, both men playing a prominent role. Thus, on the eve of the repression of the SGOIF, it shared an affinity with the FOH and the CNOC, both of which unreservedly supported the SGOIF in its struggle against *La Polar*. However, issues surrounding centralisation and industrial unionism had, at times, weakened unity, threatening to ostracise the SGOIF from other worker unions in Cuba. In the meantime, communism had entered Cuba.

If Diez had worried that the FOH was too centralised, communism was even more so, and with the purge on anarcho-syndicalists in Cuba, and the SGOIF in particular, the ground that would prepare the way for communist penetration into the unions was clearing. The anarcho-syndicalist voices raised at so many worker meetings would soon be silenced by the brutal repression, orchestrated by Machado. SGOIF delegates had spoken regularly at conferences held by the local and national Federations, in which the SGOIF had always been active. There was a distinct ideological link between the FOH, CNOC and SGOIF in 1925, as all, to some extent, aspired to anarcho-syndicalism, although they failed to agree on the finer organisational details. That the same delegates were nominated to each of the three CNOC meetings (Diez and Serra, in particular), indicates that the constant

[139] María Acosta was the only woman present at the Congress, of which she was elected provisional president.

congressional disturbances instigated by these delegates truly reflected the views of the majority of SGOIF members. Complaints made by the delegation regarding offensive words and phrases used by those responsible for drafting CNOC resolutions may well have been attempts by the SGOIF to challenge the authority of the Confederation, although that seems to have backfired on the union. What is certain is that anarcho-syndicalism was the central ideology celebrated in these conferences and that the SGOIF, in turn, was one of the largest supporters of the ideology in Cuba. That the FOH and CNOC did not organise according to industry infuriated members of the SGOIF, Diez being the most vociferous spokesperson on this theme, while the failure of the general strike in late 1924 must have further convinced the union that the industrial unionism supported by it offered a solution to the apparent weakness of worker organisation throughout the island. After all, the SGOIF had strengthened considerably since its foundation in 1917, having gained the support of workers, women among them, in so many small-scale factories, an industrial expansion unprecedented in the Cuban labour movement.

However, the union failed to promote industrial unionism in Cuba. This failure was in part due to its loss of credibility among members in the *campo*, partially blamed by them for the defeat of the general strike. This mistrust was exacerbated by representatives of the union, who publicly doubted the FOH's role in the doomed strike. The SGOIF did not seize the opportunity to become involved more fully in the organisation of the general strike and, through this, of the majority of sugar workers in Cuba. Maybe the union was not fully prepared to organise so many workers, who were employed in their thousands. Diez had intended to build a larger union that would embrace sugar workers but the SGOIF was compromised by its membership to the FOH, and union members, being so important financially to the general running of the FOH, may well have misjudged the power they held in the Federation. SGOIF suspicion surrounding centralist tendencies had also created rifts between the union

and the FOH. Very soon, the push towards industrial unionism and anarcho-syndicalism would be halted and the SGOIF would cease to exist.

Chapter 5

Anarcho-Syndicalism and Direct Action as a Revolutionary Tool

Types of Direct Action

Marcel Van der Linden has questioned whether the importance of the ideology of revolutionary syndicalism has been exaggerated. In his opinion, analysis of the ideological principles of the movement, although beneficial, is of secondary importance to the study of its organisational structure and its popularity among the workers themselves [Van der Linden, 1994:101/2]. The essence of anarcho-syndicalism in particular, he argues, rests upon its ability to motivate the rank-and-file and on their reception and interpretation of it. He further suggests that the actual structure of unions, union subscriptions (and how these were spent) and the use of direct action play a pivotal role in the organisational study of a movement. The analysis of these factors should also reveal the popularity of a movement at shop floor level.

An insight into anarchist-related unions can certainly be achieved by examining the type of direct action practised by workers and unions: the two are not interchangeable as workers often supported strikes and other forms of direct action initiated by unions of which they were not members, or else they joined a union only for the duration of a strike. Alfredo Bonanno has pointed out:

> The essential point of anarchist syndicalism was the concept of direct action, a logical consequence of their being apolitical (in the party sense), and of the spontaneity of the syndical organisation [Bonanno, 1998:28].

As discussed in Chapter 3, the outcome to be achieved through anarcho-syndicalism was two-fold and aimed to improve worker conditions in the present and in so doing

to educate and organise workers so that they would be well prepared for the imminent revolution. Rudolph Rocker explained:

> (The anarcho-syndicalist trade unions) have a double purpose: 1. To enforce the demands of the producers for the safeguarding and raising of the standard of living; 2. To acquaint the workers with the technical management of production and economic life in general and prepare them to take the socio-economic organism into their own hands and shape it according to socialist principles [Rocker, 1973:31].

For the revolution to triumph, anarcho-syndicalism promulgated direct action through trade unions, which often involved strike action. Partial strikes were regarded as preparatory ground for the General Strike which, it was assumed, would bring about the permanent collapse of the existing political system. In the meantime, other revolutionary tools were used in order to raise awareness among the workforce, to encourage solidarity and to allow the workers to voice their discontent. Such weapons included the boycott, the label[140] (the reverse of the boycott) and sabotage. It was believed that these tactics would both ensure immediate improvements and help prepare workers. This chapter will illustrate that direct action (strikes, boycotts and sabotage) used by the anarcho-syndicalist SGOIF was a major determinant (though not the sole factor) in both the closure of that particular union and in the eclipse of anarcho-syndicalism by communism in Cuba.

Strike!

The use of the strike as a revolutionary tool was seen by supporters of anarcho-syndicalism to be the true expression for the voice of proletarian discontent. The strike could help workers to fight on the two fronts so favoured by anarcho-syndicalists, considering that a successful strike would afford material benefits, while

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[140] The label, a positive boycott, whereby a stamp informed consumers that a product had been made by organised workers, was little used in Cuba. It appears to have been reserved for well-established, if less radical, unions such as the AFL in USA and Unión General del Trabajo in Spain. (See Alonso, 1928:243). The SGIOF proposed the introduction of the label at the Second National Worker Congress in February 1925 and its future use was agreed by the CNOC.

acting as a revolutionary training ground. In fact, no strike could be wholly unsuccessful, even if the immediate benefits were not secured, as it would still have the effect of fomenting solidarity and awakening the workers to revolutionary action. Furthermore, strikes gave an automatic voice to those brandishing it as a weapon, through which the workers became responsible for their own actions, while such expression of solidarity helped to illustrate vividly their position. Thorpe has termed the strike "the ideal weapon" of the syndicalists, and the weapon which, for them, held the greatest significance in the worker struggle (Thorpe, 1989:20). The preparatory value of the strike was not underestimated by supporters and any partial victory through strike action acted as a "temporary armistice" rather than a "peace treaty" for the workers, affording them a degree of success and a more solid ground on which to continue the fight for emancipation (Ridley, 1970:105). The triumph of a given strike, therefore, lay not solely in immediate benefits achieved but also in the educational development of the working class.

Organisers of the SGOIF realised that a strike forcing employers to concede worker demands would arouse the strikers' sense of achievement and draw new members to union ranks. After all, if a few days without pay (assuming the strike was short-lived) secured better working conditions, then surely others would notice these benefits and be more willing to join the union and, in turn, declare further strikes. This action, it was hoped, would cause a domino effect of strike-new members-strike, and so on.

"Las huelgas ya no son huelgas" noted one writer in *El Progreso* "son la misma Revolución Social que llama a gritos la transformación de los pueblos" (*Strikes are no longer strikes, they are the very Social Revolution that calls loudly for the transformation of society*) [*El Progreso,* 1921,g:1]. In a bid to promote the revolutionary potential of strike action, the periodical regularly reported on strikes nation-wide, and those staged by SGOIF members in particular. Internationally,

strikers usually demanded better conditions (shorter working days, higher wages and union recognition), and in Cuba, SGOIF strikes that secured such demands were well publicised, acting as a recruitment drive for the union. In one edition alone, no fewer than six triumphant strikes in factories producing various goods were detailed, alongside newly declared strikes in pasta factories [*El Progreso*, 1924, d1, 1]. Workers at the pasta factory *Productos Cubanos* had vacated their positions for two months, due to the owner's refusal to recognise the right of workers to organise, and so the news of so many success stories, it was hoped, would give hope to those pasta producers who, after all, had not received wages for weeks.

Strike funds were collected for SGOIF members who faced prolonged strike action, while sympathy strikes were commonplace, when producers belonging to the same branch of the union supported one another; for example those employed in factories making biscuits, came out on strike in support of fellow striking biscuit workers. Employers would sometimes work a step ahead of the union and exercise lockouts at factories that produced similar products to other factories where workers were already on strike. When workers at the soft drink factory, *La Habanera,* petitioned the company for improved conditions, they were locked out of the factory, without being given the opportunity to declare a strike. Collusion amongst employers resulted in a spate of lockouts at all soft drink companies, inasmuch as any worker organised by the SGOIF was refused entrance to the factory and their place was filled by non-affiliated members (or strike-breakers, according to the SGOIF) [*El Progreso*, 1925,r:1]. It had been precisely the threat of unified employer action that had spurred the SGOIF to organise along industrial lines and to engage in warfare backed by a larger army. After all, if the employers consulted one another, so should the proletariat form a stronger bond, it was reasoned.

Analysis of *El Progreso* shows that solidarity strikes (strikes in support of action by other unions) were not normally practised by SGOIF members, the union preferring

instead to cultivate its own base first, before extending solidarity to non-related unions[141]. That many other unions did not aspire to anarcho-syndicalism, and none to industrial unionism, may have been a factor for SGOIF unwillingness to rally members to strike in solidarity with them. Instead support was offered through the boycott, an action that showed solidarity with tobacco workers, for example, without a loss of members' wages, while preserving strike action for personal, more-tangible benefits.

Strikes staged by SGOIF members were exclusively non-political, that is they waged war on employers rather than the state. The union did not petition the government in a bid to transform workers' rights; there was no demand for a country-wide eight hour day for all workers regardless of trade, for example. The union's anarcho-syndicalist position opposed any political system and so it never attempted to lobby politicians in the struggle for better conditions. Although the union had to gain strength through popularity, it did not pursue it at any cost, refusing to betray the anti-politics common to all strains of anarchism. Strikes declared by SGOIF members were fought on an economic front, tackling employers at base level, since a striking workforce did not produce goods, hurting the bosses financially. However, for a strike to fully halt the wheels of a particular industrial branch, more than a partial cessation of work needed to be imposed and the SGOIF could never guarantee that all workers would support strikes. Furthermore, it could not prevent the bosses from enlisting strike-breakers from the ranks of the under-employed or unemployed (see below).

The General Strike

If partial strikes were reckoned to be one of the most effective anarcho-syndicalist tools, the General Strike was considered the ultimate revolutionary act. In a general

[141] One exception to this was the intention to join the General Strike in support of sugar workers in 1924, see below.

strike, all producers in every industry (or as many as possible) would cease work, although just what the strike would achieve depended largely on the ideology of unions and their members. Ridley pointed out that the more reformist unions understood that the strength of the General Strike lay in its ability to persuade governments and/or employers to accede to strikers' demands through legislation. Anarcho-syndicalists, on the other hand, believed such treaties to be extremely short-term and limiting, preferring to use the General Strike as a truly emancipating act [Ridley, 1970:141]. The advent of a well-prepared general strike, it was hoped, would be the first step in the expropriation of the means of production by the workers and would usher in the revolution. Rocker certainly believed in the might of the collective cessation of work when he stated: "It is the most powerful weapon which the workers have at their command and gives the most comprehensive expression to their strength as a social factor" [Rocker, 1973:39].

The coming together of workers throughout Cuba was almost realised in late 1924, when a great many unions pledged to orchestrate a general strike in support of sugar workers in Camagüey. In September, workers in Cruces staged a successful strike, after which company bosses agreed to increase wages by ten percent and to recognise the right of employees to associate. Aiming to duplicate that victory, workers at the Morón sugar mill called a strike but were denied the right to unionise. Instead, a wave of repression was unleashed on strikers, in particular at the Piña mill at Morón at which *El Progreso* strongly protested:

> Un grito de dolor, de desesperación, nos llega de Morón. Allí la sangre proletaria ha teñido el pavimiento de las calles ... Allí hay un pueblo bajo el terror del sable militar, bajo la dictadora brutal del Sr. Ponce, administrador del Central "Pina", que ordenó el desalojo en masa de las trabajadores y sus familias (*A cry of pain and desperation has reached us from Morón. There, proletarian blood has dyed the streets.... There exists a community under the military sword, under the brutal dictatorship of Mr Ponce, director of the Piña mill, who ordered the mass removal of workers and their families)* [*El Progreso*, 1924, j1:1]

The periodical urged solidarity with these displaced and repressed workers and before long train drivers in Camagüey became involved in the dispute. The Unión de Obreros del Ferrocarril del Norte de Cuba (North of Cuba Rail Workers' Union) refused to ferry anything to those mills involved in the atrocities, while helping to relocate the 42 families of sugar workers, evicted from their homes by employers for voicing opposition to the sackings of striking workers [*El Progreso*, 1924: l1 and n1]. Likewise, workers at the Tarafa port struck, refusing to deport foreign workers, resulting in the forced closure of their union headquarters and leading to the arrest of union members [*El Progreso*, 1924, s1:1].

Strikers began to confront the repression and, according to Chapman, conservative periodicals of the day accused workers of destroying up to 25,000 *arrobas* of sugar cane, which came as no surprise, he observed, as the sabotage of sugar plantations, through burning, was an easy option [Chapman, 1927:630]. As the repression spread to plantations in Céspedes in Camagüey, where more families had been ejected from their homes and more arrests were made, *El Progreso* reported that "los huelguistas han jurado, que si no se reconoce sus derechos de asociación, Cuba será un desierto sin plantaciones que moler" (*the strikers have sworn that if their rights of association are not recognised, Cuba will be a desert with no plantations left to mill*) [*El Progreso*, 1924,s1:1]. *¡Tierra*! detailed the cruelty of the company bosses toward the workers and urged the downtrodden to retaliate, assuring them that "la fuerza sólo puede repelerse con la fuerza" (*force can only be repelled by force*) [*¡Tierra!*, 1924,e:2].

Repression of sugar workers continued, appearing to receive the full support of Zayas' government while non-worker periodicals condemned strikers, accusing them of destroying national wealth, to which *¡Tierra!* replied that the wealth accrued from sugar did not help to support the island nor the majority of its inhabitants but was

concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie [*¡Tierra!*, 1924,g:2]. However, reported *El Progreso*, the government had now shifted from inactive observer of repressive measures to protagonist, protecting not only capital in general but, more specifically, foreign capitalist interests. Sugar workers:

> Se ven atropellados y vejados por las autoridades cubanas, puestas incondicionalmente al servico de las grandes empresas americanas (*are being trampled underfoot and harassed by the Cuban authorities, unconditionally at the service of the large American companies*) [*El Progreso*, 1924, s1:1].

The unrest in the interior would have been worrying to the US companies who had poured millions of dollars into the sugar industry in Cuba, an investment that the Cuban government was keen to see protected. Strikes were staged at a propitious moment for the workers, the uprising taking place on the eve of the cane-cutting season when labour was in great demand. Furthermore, solidarity with the sugar workers was immense throughout the island, acting as a trigger for discontent nation-wide as unions in the cities and countryside alike planned to stage a supportive general strike, in opposition to company and government repression. Combined, these factors unnerved both company bosses and the government who increased repression, serving only to anger workers into organised resistance.

On 21st November 1924, a meeting was held at the Centro Obrero in Havana "Ante el dilema planteado por la represión del Gobierno" (*Facing the dilemma posed by governmental repression*) [*El Progreso*, 1924: r1]. Worker organisations present at the meeting agreed to be ready for a general strike and each union was to set up a fund to help the strikers and their families. A Congress was planned for 14th December to discuss the way forward for the workers of Cuba "en estos momentos y en el futuro" (*now and in the future*) [*El Progreso*, 1924, s1:1].[142]

[142] This meeting resulted in the formation of the FOH

However, before the meeting took place, a deal was reached between the Camagüeyan strike committee and the Government, in which it was agreed that an arbitration committee be set up consisting of five representatives: two from the Sindicato de Trabajadores de Ingenios (Sugar Workers' Union), two from the Asociación de Hacendados y Colonos de Cuba (*Association of Mill Owners and Planters*) and one from the Government. The Government promised that the committee would investigate the charges of worker mistreatment while sugar and train strikes were called off. Thus, the General Strike was aborted, infuriating radical elements in *El Progreso* although *¡Tierra!* was less scathing. Some demands had been met, it contended, presumably referring to the fact that at least one union was now being recognised:

> Si para los trabajadores no ha sido un completo fracaso para Zayas ha sido un triunfo absoluto y resonanate (*If, for the workers, it has not been a complete failure, for Zayas it has been an absolute and tremendous triumph)* [*¡Tierra!*, 1924,I:1]

It did, however, concede that:

> Fue como un vaso de agua fría arrojado sobre (la protesta)..... ha sido liquidada esta situación, la más importante y trascendental que en Cuba se ha presentado en las luchas proletarias (*It was as though a glass of cold water was thrown over [the protest]..... The situation has been eliminated, the most important and momentous situation that the proletarian struggle in Cuba has faced)* [*¡Tierra!* 1924, I:1].

The SGOIF hoped that rather than completely quelling unrest, the deal was simply a temporary truce and once the findings of the committee were made public, the workers would again rise up and the General Strike would succeed. The union tried to soften the blow to morale, taking the line that any strike boosted solidarity and helped prepare the proletariat for future struggles, besides: "entre la clase capitalista y la clase trabajadora no existen intereses comunes" (*no common interests between*

the capitalist class and the working class exist) [*El Progreso*, 1924: v1]. The struggle would not finish, it maintained, until all workers had been organised by industry. Members of the SGOIF were not happy with the outcome of the strike, contending that the proletariat had not been sufficiently prepared to carry out a general strike.

Writing seven months prior to the planned strike, A. Moyano observed that it was necessary for an all-out strike to sweep the country very quickly [*El Progreso*, 1924, q:1]. Ridley has pointed out that, although a general strike must be sudden, certain conditions are necessary if one is to be successful, namely a strike fund is needed, propaganda must be carried out and it must be well prepared, ensuring co-ordination and support [Ridley, 1970: 144]. Furthermore, key federations and unions must participate. In December 1924, transport workers (trains and docks), vital to the running of the country and for the transportation of Cuba's principal export, sugar, became involved in the dispute. The strike was also supported by a myriad of unions in Havana, through the FOH, and so it seems that there was no lack of support among key workers. The FOH tried frantically to promote the strike to ensure its success but, as the SGOIF pointed out, the workers were not ready for such action. Members of the manufacturers' union had been struggling for years to associate, whereas many in Cuba had not, and the sugar workers, in particular, had not yet been federated into one union, a problem that industrial unionists within the SGOIF hoped soon to rectify (see chapter 4).

The SGOIF understood the importance of the General Strike but felt the time was not yet ripe. Workers were encouraged to prepare for such instances by regularly staging partial strikes that were ordinarily coupled with well-publicised boycotts of goods made in those factories where strikes had been declared.

The Boycott

At the 1898 Rennes congress, the French revolutionary syndicalist union the Confedédération Générale du Travail (CGT), first discussed the use of the boycott as a revolutionary tool [Mitchell, 1990:28]. Thereafter, the boycott, along with sabotage and the label, was accepted as a viable weapon in the fight against the ruling class and was adopted throughout the anarcho-syndicalist world [Thorpe, 1989:20]. Its implementation, it was hoped, would constitute part of that preparatory ground in which the workers would build a common bond, a sense of "us against them". It formed part of direct action, which helped forge worker solidarity. After all:

> A small improvement achieved by one's own effort is worth more, in its effect on morale - materially too, in the long term – than a large scale reform granted by government or capitalists for doubtful ends or even out of the "kindness of their hearts" [Malatesta, *Umanitá Nova, 06/04/1922*].

Boycotts were certainly held up as an example of worker cohesion as it was part of that popular struggle which benefited the revolutionary cause, bolstering solidarity, while being employed as a pressure tactic against bosses in particular [Van der Linden, 1994:111]. The refusal to buy a given product, as well as giving voice to the discontented producer/consumer, pressurised the employer into conceding to worker demands. According to the worker leader Hilario Alonso, the boycott was a valuable tool against oppression, although in Cuba, he believed, it had been abused, being depended on far too frequently [Alonso, 1927:248].

Indeed, during the early twentieth century, worker unions in Cuba wielded the boycott on countless occasions. It had been written about in *¡Tierra!* as early as 1902, although it enjoyed its heyday during the mid-1920s. The café, restaurant and hotel workers brought the boycott to the forefront of their own struggle against employers

during the 1910s. In *La Voz del Dependiente* (1907-1911) and *El Dependiente* (1911-1918), the practicality of all forms of direct action was detailed, and readers were informed of those boycotts being operated at any particular time.

One of the earliest examples of worker boycotts in Cuba was the curious boycott exercised against certain railway trains in 1909. Ironing staff on *trenes de lavado* (trains with a washing service) had declared a strike in an attempt to secure higher wages and, as a result, the authorities had reportedly stormed trains, injuring twenty-five workers and arresting sixty. As a result, trains that normally employed those workers now in prison were shunned as were those belonging to companies that had refused to increase starvation wages [*La Voz del Dependiente*, 1909, b:2]. This case is unusual in that workers enforced a consumer strike on a commodity so rarely used by the general populace at that time as to render the boycott futile.

Boycotting had been most advantageous when the (type of) product ostracised was ordinarily used every day by the populace. In early twentieth century Cuba, passenger carriages were seldom, if ever, used by the proletariat, as Cuban railroads mainly served private investment, usually transporting sugar between plantation, mill and dock. Thus the (non-)consumer had very limited bargaining power with the train company or owner. In defence of the boycotting workers, though, this appears to have been a one-off situation and subsequent consumer strikes would target "boycottable" goods.

Van der Linden has pointed out that boycotted goods should be easily identifiable: "it is easier to boycott pre-packaged goods than items without brand names" [van der Linden, 1994:112]. They should also be replaceable, so consumers need not sacrifice the type of product completely. After mistakes made, Cuban workers applied this rule in their fight for union recognition, improved conditions and higher

wages. The most popular products boycotted (from around 1912) were specific bottled beers, soft drink and cigarettes, as such products could be identified without problem; they were non-essential products and could be easily replaced with other, similar brands. Interestingly, *El Dependiente* seemingly failed to appreciate the irony of promoting boycotts against particular alcoholic beverages while disseminating the anarchist ideals of temperance and healthy living and, throughout the 1910s, the periodical printed weekly advertisements selling beer, spirits, wine and cigarettes. Indeed, "capitalist" adverts may have been the reason for the rare longevity of the periodical, providing the funds necessary for its very survival and it is probable that, needing to attract workers to the cause, anarchists had, in part, to compromise their ideals. The desire to further solidarity through a boycott of *Tropical* beer for example, contradicted anarchist articles in the same paper concerning the evils of all alcohol [*El Dependiente*, 1912, a and b]. Concessions of this type have led to a string of attacks against unionism, whether anarchist-led or not. Non-syndicalist anarchists, such as McGowan, have declared that the very nature of anarcho-syndicalism (i.e. trade unionism) is fatal to the survival of anarchism. In a bid to draw as many workers as possible to its ranks, a union will eventually lose its anarchist identity, although to remain true to anarchist principles, its disciples "must exercise a revolutionary influence by keeping an uncompromising position" [McGowan in Bonanno, 1998:3].

Boycotts in Cuba were often simultaneous with strikes. In most cases, unsuccessful strikes (i.e. those where bosses refused to surrender to demands) metamorphosed into worker boycotts, which often tended to not only complement strikes but to replace them, attracting the support of workers who wished to demonstrate their discontent and camaraderie by means other than the more direct strike action route. The sheer volume of boycotts exercised in Cuba must point towards their popularity although their success rate is somewhat dubious. Attitudes surrounding the boycott

of *La Polar* beer, for example, may have been the trigger for the eventual downfall of anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba. What does seem certain is that company bosses/administrators would not be dictated to by employees.

A Case Study: The Boycott of *La Polar* Beer

Más coplas inéditas de Zorrilla[143]

Si eres obrero consciente
Y la causa te interesa
No dejes de BOYCOTEAR
De *la Polar* la Cerveza

Si acaso ves a Zorrilla
Dile que está fracasado
Porque tienen *tarabilla*
De la FABRIL los soldados

Fíjate en lo que te digo
Que ello es lo que más anhelo
Que no tomes nada frío
De la Polar con hielo

Si ves algún rompe-huelga
Que trabaje en la Polar
Fórmale pronto la GUERRA
No te vaya a degradar

Júzgate tú por ti mismo
Y también por el ajeno
No tomes de la Polar
Porque sirve de veneno

Serénate y cosidera
Que la HUELGA has de ganar
Sonándole al rompe-huelga
Que trabaja en la Polar

(More Unpublished Verse about Zorrilla // If you are a conscientious worker/ And the cause interests you/ Do not fail to BOYCOTT/ Polar beer// If you happen to see Zorrilla/ Tell him that he has failed/ Because they are a dead loss/ The FACTORY soldiers// Take heed of what I say to you/ That which I desire the most/ Is that you do not drink anything cold/ From la Polar with ice// If you see some strike-breaker/ Who works in la Polar/ Tell him swiftly that the WAR/ Is not going to degrade you// Judge

[143] Emerterio Zorrilla was the administrator and owner of the Compañía Cervecería, the company to which *La Polar* beer belonged.

for yourself/ And for others/ Do not drink la Polar/ Because it poisons// Be quiet and consider/ That you have to win the STRIKE/ Be heard by the strike-breaker/ Who works at la Polar) [*El Progreso*, 1921, t:1].

The above poem appeared in E*l Progreso* on November 23, 1921, just one month after the strike at *La Polar* brewery had been declared. The strike made way for a worker/consumer boycott of *La Polar* brand of beer, a bitter obsession that lasted almost 4 years, one that led to death, expulsions and imprisonment and that was partly responsible for the downfall of the SGOIF. In the opinion of Córdova, the demise of the union and public anger surrounding its use of direct action were very much contributory factors in the weakening and eventual collapse of anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba [Córdova, 1997: 140]. In order to determine the importance of the *La Polar* case in the decline of the SGOIF, this study will follow the trajectory of the strike/boycott, drawing information from a number of sources, both pro- and anti-boycott.

The Cause of the Strike

In October 1921, dozens of brewery workers laid down their tools at *La Polar* factory in a demand for better working conditions. According to the reformist worker monthly *Aurora*, the strike began over a dispute for Sunday overtime. Reportedly, workers throughout the industry had acceded to a cut in pay although the Compañía Cervecera (CCía), owners of the factory, had agreed to award the employees double pay for any hours worked over the standard 48-hour week. However, as brewery work was a continuous process, the 6-day week began as soon as work commenced, i.e. if an employee started his week's work on Saturday, he would finish that week on Thursday, having Friday free. In this instance, Friday would be, for that worker, the day that double pay would come into force and Sunday was treated as a normal working day for which the overtime rule did not apply (unless Sunday

happened to fall on the worker's day off). The employers had not been clear on this point and so the brewers assumed that they would receive extra wages for Sunday work. Also, the cut in wages introduced at *La Tropical* factory had been less severe than that at *La Polar*. The union resented such treatment and sent an ultimatum to the CCía, which refused demands, leading to the declaration of a strike among associated members at the factory [Aurora, 1923:d].

As with many other branded names, the strike quickly evolved into a boycott of *La Polar* beer by the SGOIF. Through *El Progreso*, the SGOIF relentlessly propagated the boycott and endless verbal, and sometimes physical, confrontations ensued.

Sabotage: the Poisoning of *La Polar* beer

The boycott at *La Polar* was a long, drawn out affair, the union refusing to compromise and the CCía declining to meet demands, although Emeterio Zorrilla, administrator of the CCía, did approach the SGOIF at their headquarters at Zulueta 37. Zorrilla requested that the union send a commission to *La Polar* factory in an attempt to resolve the conflict, a request that SGOIF leaders refused [*El Progreso*, 1923, j:1], adamant that demands be met in full, stubbornness perhaps related to fear that a failure at *La Polar* would result in irreparable damage to the union.

During 1922, a bomb was placed at the home of Zorrilla for which the black Cuban Margarito Iglesias (sometimes Secretary General, sometimes vice-Secretary General of the SGOIF, but always a major figure in the union) was held responsible [AN 390/11694:89]. The grandson of slaves and a native of Pinar del Río, only in his mid-20s at the foundation of the SGOIF, Iglesias was labelled aggressive by the daily

press and was known to the police as a dangerous anarchist.[144] However, Iglesias was acquitted of the bombing through lack of evidence and he continued to play a leading role in the union.

According to Córdova, other bombs were also placed on company premises [Córdova, 1997:140]. The SGOIF was accused but the allegations were vehemently denied through *El Progreso*, which insisted that the union was being framed and that the CCía was aiming simply to discredit those members of the union they believed to be key figures. Such dirty tactics would fail, however, as:

> ....tantos y tantos miles de trabajadores (que) en Cuba laboran y laborarán incansablemente hasta que la "Polar" desaparezca o se rinda" (...*thousands and thousands of workers fight and will fight tirelessly until La* Polar *disappears or surrenders*) *[El Progreso,* 1923, i:1].

The SGOIF continued to accuse the company and their allies, the government and the secret police, *La Porra,* of conspiring to harm fatally the reputation of the union. The battle became bloodier when bottles of beer bearing the boycotted label of *La Polar* appeared on the market laced with poison. Allegedly, Angel Arias Trillo, Luis Quirós Presa and Eduardo Rivera, all prominent members of the SGOIF, bought four bottles of *La Polar* beer from Café Arena in the Havana district of Vedado. One of them then took the purchase to a car and swapped one of the bottles of beer with another laced with strychnine. The poisoned bottle was then returned to the café and exchanged for a bottle of mineral water. A young Spaniard, Luis Gómez López, consumed the contaminated beer the following day and he died instantly. The same

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[144] *El Heraldo*, 18/071924, cutting found in AN, 390/11684: 81. The periodical stated that "su secretario, el célebre y agresivo Margarito Iglesias, ha sido acusado por la policía de ácrata y pernicioso" (*its secretary, the famous and aggressive Margarito Iglesias, has been accused by the police of being an anarchist and dangerous*).

procedure was apparently followed at Café Japón where two consumers, Pablo Navarro Torres and Domingo Martínez, were intoxicated, although the effects were not fatal [*La Lucha,* 03/10/1924:3]. Before long three well-known members of the SGOIF were arrested. The news of the arrests of Quirós, Arias and Rivera was first broken in *El Progreso* on 3rd January, 1924. The periodical declared that the three prisoners had been framed: they had previously been persecuted and accused of the placing of a bomb at the home of the deputy chief of police, Señor Delane. The charge was unfounded. *El Progreso* claimed that the three SGOIF comrades were "víctimas inocentes de infames venganzas de la burguesía" (*innocent victims of infamous bourgeois vengeance*), [*El Progreso*, 1924:a] and denounced the poisoning as a "crimen bárbaro, crimen monstruoso" (*barbarous crime, monstrous crime),* [*El Progreso,* 1925,g:1]

(*Look After Your Health: Don't Drink* Polar Beer!) [El *Progreso,* 1924, C1: 7]

The Strike Committee insisted that Zorrilla had targeted the men specifically, alleging that the brewery was on the verge of bankruptcy as a direct result of the boycott imposed by the SGOIF and that, through blind panic, the company administration had contaminated its own product. Thereafter "Emeterio Zorrilla, en la imposibilidad de encarcelar a todo el proletariado de Cuba decide declarar responsable a los camaradas Arias, Riviera y Quirós" (*Faced with the impossibility of jailing the whole of the Cuban proletariat, Emeterio Zorrilla decided to declare our comrades Arias, Riviera and Quirós responsible*), [*El Progreso*, 1925, b:1]. According to the periodical, he then paid police, judges and the press to help to convict the workers.

On numerous occasions, however, state correspondence maintained that the three workers were indeed the protagonists of the poisoning. Aurelio Acosta, Chief of the Secret Police, informed the Governor of the Province of Havana that "el sabotaje es empleado por los directores de ese Sindicato, con una naturalidad pasmosa (*sabotage is employed by the leaders of this Union with an astonishing naturalness*), [AN, *SGOIF:110.*]. Indeed, the three men had been both longstanding members of the union and active in the promotion of the boycott. Arias, Quirós and Rivera were all Spanish workers known to the Cuban authorities. Although it had apparently been proven that Angel Arias possessed Cuban citizenship, he had previously been expelled from the island under the *Menocalato* and transferred to prisons in Spain and her possessions, Fernando Poo and Cabo Jubi. After some years under the Spanish penal system, Arias returned to Cuba where he was noted for "su actuación en los grupos anarquistas, y más aún, su incensante campaña de agitación en las masas obreras..." (*his conduct in anarchist groups and more still, his incessant campaign of agitation among the workers*), [*El Progreso*, 1924:i1]. Such action led to his persecution by the authorities and ultimately jail. By the admission of *El Progreso*, Arias was one of the most ardent propagandists of the boycott *at La Polar*

[*El Progreso,* 1924,i:1].[145] Quirós was, at the time of the poisonings, Secretary of the union in which both he and Rivera had been members since its foundation and, according to Amadeo Pérez, a member of the men's defense committee, they possessed even more influence than Arias in the struggle of the union and "su actividad en la propia lucha de la "Polar" no ha sido igualada" [*Their activity in the "Polar" boycott has not been equaled*], [*El Progreso* , 1924,i1:1]. The men could not be convicted of the crime, he went on, as there had been no witness to the deed.

Córdova has suggested that workers did, in fact, tamper with the ingredients of *La Polar* beer due to union dismay at the failure of the boycott [Córdova, 1997:140]. Certainly, *El Progreso* did capitalise on the poisonings, using the sub-standard product as pro-boycott propaganda. In September 1924, for example, the periodical urged its readers to "¡¡BOICOT a la Cerveza POLAR, por ser hecha con rompe-huelgas y estar envenenada!!". (*BOYCOTT POLAR beer, as it is made by strike-breakers and is poisoned) [El Progreso,* 1924, g1:1]. The article then went on to warn, in English, that "Drinking? (*sic*) POLAR beer means death".[146] The guilt of Arias, Quirós and Rivera was never proven and the men were eventually freed, public support for them having been formidable, according to the periodical.

Released on 10th March 1925, the accused had spent over a year in police custody and during that time endless propaganda was printed in *El Progreso* in support of them. A Comité de Defensa y Propaganda (*Committee of Defence and Propaganda)* was formed within the SGOIF: "para esclarecer la criminal infamia que le quieren imputar a nuestra organización y a nuestros camaradas presos" (*to clear up the criminal infamy that they wish to pin on our organisation and on our imprisoned comrades),* [E*l Progreso*, 1924, k:2]. Throughout the campaign to free the men, large

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[145] Arias died on 20/08/1947, then an active member in the PCC, [see IMSHRC, a, 1985:202]
[146]It is possible that this warning appeared in English in a bid to attract the attention of consumers from the USA of whom there was an influx in the midst of US prohibition.

collections were made at various breweries, soft drink and bottling factories, where workers belonging to the SGOIF made generous contributions. During the early period of the collections, weekly amounts in excess of $1,000 were raised; a sizeable sum considering that the average daily wage earned in a drink factory was approximately $3.[147]

In addition, protest meetings were staged each week in various parks around the capital.[148] Editions of *El Progreso* proudly printed photographs of such demonstrations to show the extent of public support for the SGOIF prisoners. Also, the anarchist group El Sembrador hosted a soirée in Havana, raising $103. However, the protests were not limited to Havana and before long "vibrantes y numerosos mítines" (*vibrant and well-attended meetings*) were being held in Camagüey, Morón, Caibarién, Sagua la Grande, Santa Clara, Cienfuegos and Victoria de las Tunas [E*l Progreso*,1924:o]. In the city of Santa Clara, a pro-prisoner demonstration reportedly lasted for two days [*El Progreso*, 1924, t:2]. In Regla, a suburb of Havana, a protest meeting resulted in clashes between workers and the police, although the SGOIF maintained that the workers were provoked into retaliation by an administration that was so profoundly worried at the growing strength of the union, especially considering the solidarity display by hundreds of workers [*El Progreso*, 1924, O:3].

However, it is evident that popular backing began to wane as the months passed. In September 1924, *El Progreso* reported that a meeting held in support of the accused at Parque Jesús María in Havana had been poorly attended. The boycott was entering its fourth year and the prisoners were soon to be threatened with the death

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[147] In the first to weeks of the collection $1,033 and $1,259 was raised, respectively. See E*l Progreso*, 1924:a.
[148] For example, well attended meetings were held in Havana on 23 January, 7 February, 9 February, 16 February and 1 March.

penalty or 35 years imprisonment. By this time, emphasis had shifted from the boycott and its "victims" (although the case was still covered by *El Progreso*) to the wider, national worker struggle; in particular the fate of rural workers and the use of direct action at numerous sugar mills dominated both the worker press and solidarity protests. It seems likely that fellow workers, and by extension the general public, were becoming disillusioned by the longevity of *La Polar* boycott and by its failure to generate positive results.

Despite the apparent flagging enthusiasm for the case, *El Progreso* continued to publicise the men's plight. The accused were frequently compared to the two Italian anarchists awaiting trial for murder in Boston, through slogans such as "Sacco, Vanzetti, Arias, Quirós y Rivera son inocentes" (*Sacco, Vanzetti, Arias, Quirós and Rivera are innocent*) [*El* Progreso, 1924: q1]. Neglect of the dispute would have admitted defeat at a time when the union still hankered after industrial unionism. Covering the trial of the alleged contaminators in February and March of 1925, *El Progreso* reported that Alfonso Luis Fors,[149] the Chief of Judicial Police, "(D)ijo poco más o menos que Arias, Quirós y Rivera han sido los colcadores de todas las bombas que han estallado en el continente americano desde que Colón tuvo la feliz idea de descrubrirlo" (*He more or less said that Arias, Quirós and Rivera had placed every bomb that had ever exploded on the American continent since Columbus had had the great idea of discovering it*), [*El Progreso*, 1925, e:1]. They were accused of being "terribles anarquistas..... monstruos....destructores de instinto de cielo, mar y tierra" *(terrible anarchists...monsters...born destroyers of the sky, sea and earth)* [*El Progreso*, 1925, e:1]. Despite such denunciations by the authorities, the three members of the SGOIF were acquitted and *El Progreso* was jubilant as it gloated that "una vez más ha triunfado la razón y la justicia" (*Once more reason and justice have*

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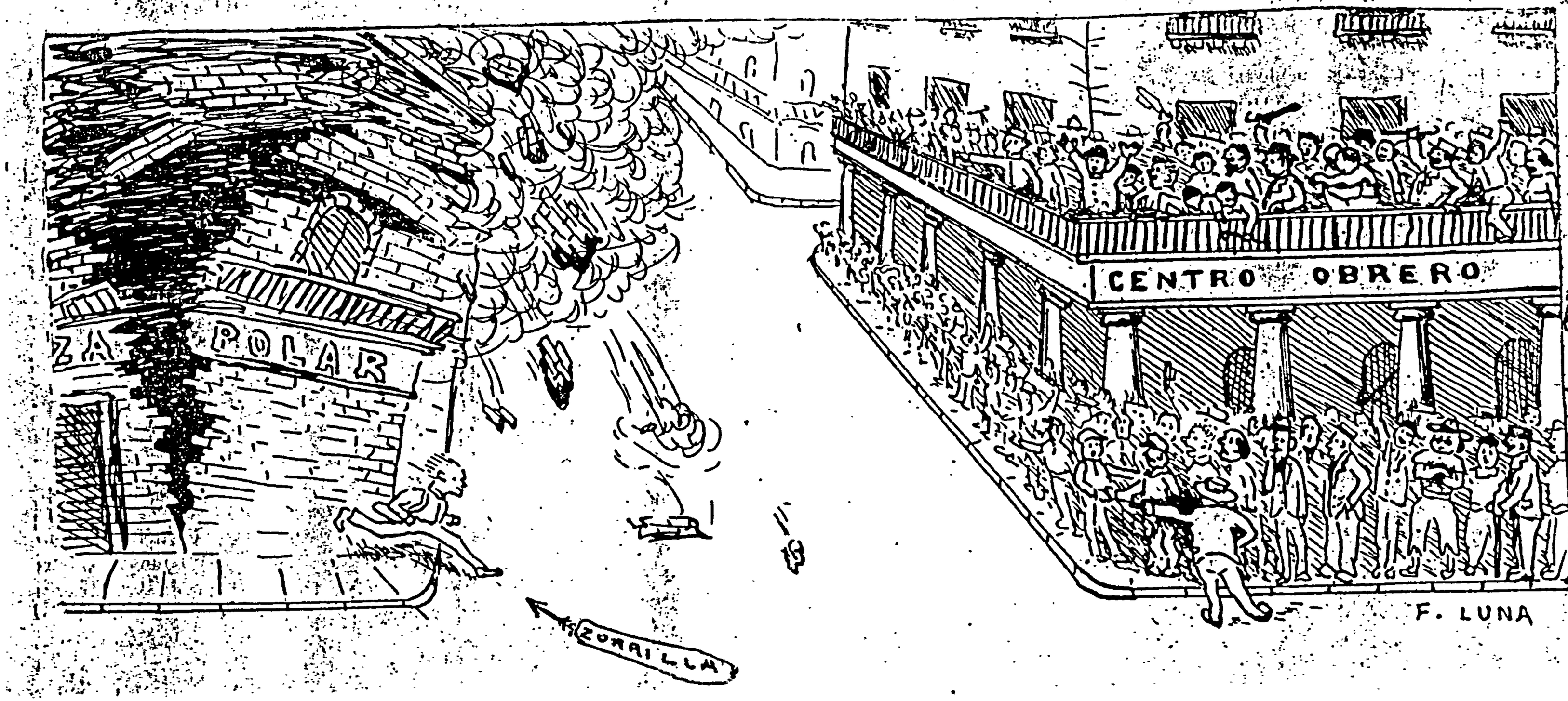
[149] *El Progreso* referred to Fors as "el Nick Carter criollo, con más cara de bobo que de otra cosa" (*the creole Nick Carter, with more of a fool's face than anything else*) [*El Progreso*, 1925: e]. Nick Carter was a 1920s US fictional Master Detective.

"LA POLAR" Ante La Ruina Que La Invade

Organizaciones, Manifiestos, todos los recursos imaginables para salir de la quiebra a que la ha conducido la soberbia y el despotismo de su delincuente Administración.



(La Polar *Faced with the Collapse that Encroaches upon it. Organisations, Manifestos, all the imaginable means by which to escape the bankruptcy being steered towards it by the arrogance and despotism of its delinquent Administration*) [*El Progreso*, 1924, 197:8].

triumphed) [*El Progreso*, 1923:f]. "¡MANTENGAMOS EL BOICOT!" (*We will continue the boycott!)*, cried the periodical [*El Progreso,* 1925, h:1]. The boycott continued.

Propaganda and Support

For almost four years *El Progreso* urged workers and readers of the periodical to boycott *La Polar* beer and other products made by Compañía Cervecera (e.g. *Agua Gaseosa San Francisco*). Phrases such as "NO TOME CERVEZA POLAR" QUE ESTÉ BOYCOTEADA; ES ELABORADA POR ROMPE-HUELGAS"[150] (*Don't drink Polar Beer as it is boycotted; it's made by strike-breakers)* and "¡¡BOICOT!! a la cerveza POLAR (y) al agua SAN FRANCISCO....." *(Boycott!! Polar Beer {and} San Francisco Water*) were regular weekly features in the worker periodical [*El Progreso*, 1924: n1 and 1923: i, respectively]. Reference to the boycott appeared continually and updates were published, while any union communication with the CCía was reported and commented upon, and the attack on Zorrilla gained strength with the passing, frustrating months.

A Strike Committee was formed at Puentes Grandes. Created by members of the SGOIF, the Committee naturally displayed wholehearted support for the strike at *La Polar*:

> Este Comité de Huelga moverá todo lo que haya que mover para triunfar, los compañeros de las distintas Fábricas que componen nuestro Sindicato, cooperan con nosotros con todos los medios a su alcance para hacer bajar la cerviz a aquellos que creyéndonos pequeños se atrevieron a jugar con nuestro honor. (*The Strike Committee shall do all that it must in order to triumph; comrades in the various factories that make up our Union will cooperate with us by every means possible, to bring into submission those who, believing us be insignificant, dare to play with our honour)* [*El Progreso*, 1921, t:1].

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[150] Written in upper case in original version.

The Strike Committee promised the strikers at *La Polar* that they would receive the cooperation of all SGOIF union members, a figure that they reported to be around 4,000 [*El Progreso*, 1924: v and w]. Beside the support of members of their own union, the strikers at *La Polar* could rely on the solidarity of unions throughout the country. Early on in the campaign, E*l Progreso* reported that the boycott had received the backing of unions in Santiago de Cuba, Cienfuegos and Camagüey, from workers employed in a wide range of trades [*El Progreso*, 1921, u:1].

According to Hilario Alonso, the boycott was indeed a popular success, albeit one that he understood to be misleading. Fiercely against the boycott of *La Polar*, Alonso said of it:

> Quísose convirtirlo en nacional y se engañó con el (sic) a toda la clase obrera de Cuba de una manera ignominiosa, particularmente a los trabajadores de provincias, que desconocedores de lo que ocuría alrededor del mismo y del poco caso que le hacían los trabajadores de la Habana, no radicales, que concocían los secretos de él, prestáronse a darles oído a los excursionistas que periódicamente solían recorrer la República, alentándolo y propagándolo, a fin de hacer el caldo gordo a todos los que vivían del boycot de referencia.... (*Wanting to make it national and so shamelessly deceiving the whole of the Cuban working class, especially the workers in the provinces, who were unaware of what surrounded the boycott or of the fact that the non-radical workers of Havana, who knew of its secrets, did not pay heed to it, they listened to the excursionists who periodically toured the Republic, encouraging it and propagating it, in order to make life easier for those who were making a living from the mentioned boycott* [Alonso, 1928: 247].

This statement unequivocally illustrates that Alonso viewed the SGOIF as deceitful, and the workers of the interior as gullible and unaware of working-class issues. The fact that sugar workers had previously fought for benefits in the mills and factories along anarchist lines and would continue to do so, especially in 1924, contradicts Alonso. Workers did possess a political consciousness, one that had, for years, been manifested through trade union membership and/or anarchism, for which they had suffered persecution by the authorities. Neither is his view that the workers of Havana, outside the SGOIF, were against the strike at *La Polar* entirely true.

Unions throughout Havana swiftly responded to the call for solidarity in direct action against the CCía. The FOH which had only very recently been formed, announced itself a supporter of the boycott of *La Polar* just days after it was declared in November 1921 and its Committee took the boycott seriously. A FOH flyer promoting a cultural evening added a postscript reminding workers to boycott *La Polar* and *Agua de San Francisco* [FOH, 22] while action was taken by the FOH against those worker unions that refused to collaborate. Through its organ, *Aurora*, the Unión de Dependientes de Café broke the code of the boycott when it advertised the prohibited *La Polar* beer in its pages. The FOH promptly expelled the union from its ranks [IMHRSC, b, 1985:351], also castigating the Unión de Vendedores (*Sales Union*) during the summer of 1923 because of defiance of what *Aurora* labelled "el maldito boycot a la cerveza 'Polar'" (*the cursed boycott of* La Polar beer) [*Aurora*, 1923:b].

In November 1924, *El Progreso* admitted that, although many organisations had supported the boycott, the financial crisis of 1921 and 1922 had demoralised the worker movement and so the boycott had not had the desired outcome during that time. However, the periodical continued, the economic situation in Cuba had improved during 1923 and according to *El Progreso*, worker organisation strengthened at around that time and with it the effectiveness of *La Polar* boycott [*El Progreso*, 1924:q1]. Furthermore, such dedication and solidarity by the workers had served to damage the interests of the CCía, insisted *El Progreso* [*El Progreso*, 1924, q1:2].

Despite such optimism, the boycott of *La Polar* did attract hostility. Besides the constant bickering between *Aurora* and *El Progreso*, anti-boycott sentiment appeared elsewhere, as in July 1924 when rail workers held a banquet in the grounds of *La Polar* for the purpose of celebrating the successful outcome of a rail strike. The

reformist railworkers union, La Hermandad Ferroviaria de Cuba (HFC), denied official involvement in the banquet, stating through the periodical *El Heraldo* that they had not wished to exacerbate the already high tensions between those workers who supported the boycott and those who did not [*El Progreso*, 1924, b1:2]. It remained, however, that some workers did work in the factory gardens, perhaps indicating that not all workers favoured SGOIF tactics.

Anti-boycott sentiment was not limited to reformist unions, the Government and company loyalists. The orthodox anarchist periodical *Acción Consciente* did not support the boycott on the grounds that the factory produced beer and that they, being orthodox anarchists, felt compelled to boycott all alcohol. They asked, "¿Tenemos nosotros la culpa que estos miles de obreros y compañeros no produzcan algo de más utilidad para todos?" (*Is it our fault that these thousands of workers and comrades do not produce something of more use to all?)* [*Acción Consciente*, 1922, a]. A strand of the moralistic anarchist tradition of the 1910s (see Chapter 2) was still evident, albeit to a lesser extent. *Acción Consciente* would only survive a few editions, presumably selling too few copies to continue production.[151] Anarcho-syndicalism had surplanted anarchism in Cuba. In the meantime, anti-boycott (and so anti-anarcho-syndicalist) propaganda and action was not only growing outside the industry, but was also evident within it.

<u>Strike-breakers and Parallel Unions</u>

In its 3 April, 1924 edition, *El Progreso* published an article under the heading <u>SINDICATOS CATÓLICOS</u> [*El Progreso*, 1924, m:1]. The piece informed of a Catholic strike-breaking union being formed at *La Polar* brewery, an amalgam of

[151] In the last known copy of the periodical, the editorial team complained of lack of funds, stating that it would have to cease production if no financial help was acquired. Only twelve copies went to print. [*Acción Consciente*, 1923:g].

Government-funded anti-labour agitators, a small church group and, curiously, an anti-clerical and rationalist federation.

The Unión Nacional del Trabajo (UNT) was formed on 30 May 1922, three weeks after the meeting of Havana unions and the consolidation of the FOH [Montejo Arrechea, 1976: 40]. In the wake of the FOH Congress, the Government had founded the UNT in an attempt to confuse and weaken the labour movement in Cuba. According to Felipe Zapata, a well-known SGOIF traitor and subsequent editor of Machado's pseudo-worker periodical *Acción Socialista*, the UNT was the joint brainchild of the Cuban priest Padre Paco and of the founder of the Academia Católica de Ciencias Sociales (*Catholic Academy of Social Sciences*), Dr Mariano Aramburu [*Unidad Gastronómica,* 1950: a]. In order to broaden the appeal of the UNT, Aramburu employed known worker leaders Juan José Sabatés and Alfredo Padrón to head the Union. Both men, however, were neither Catholic nor pro-Government. Zapata described Sabatés as being Marxist, atheist and anti-clerical and Padrón as a semi-anarchist, semi-Marxist, anti-clerical Mason [*Unidad Gastronómica*, 1950: a]. Despite seemingly radical leanings, the appointed UNT leaders understood the necessity of attracting support for the evolving union and, rather than attempt to infiltrate the ranks of existing organisations, such as the FOH or the SGOIF, decided to recruit members who might help to combat these predominantly anarcho-syndicalist unions in Havana.

In contradiction to their principles, the Secretary of the UNT, Padrón, and its President, Sabatés, headed a UNT propaganda meeting at the conservative and Catholic Congregación Mariana Obrera (CMO), which was also formed in 1922. The CMO headed by Padre Camerero, was:

> Una institución ostensiblemente confesional y católica, estrechamente regida canónicamente por su Consilario esclasiástico: esas particularidades chocaban violentamente con la formación mental anarquista y anticlerical de las masas obreras cubanas (*An ostensibly confessional and Catholic institution, rigidly and canonically ruled by a church Council. Those characteristics clashed violently with the anarchist and anticlerical education of the Cuban working masses)* [*Unidad Gastronómica,* 1948, a:1]

The CMO never flourished, and would die along with Padre Camerero in 1929.

Perhaps the reason for its failure lay in the collective radical mind of the working class. In Brazil, a predominantly Catholic country, popular Catholic belief was contrary and at times hostile to the anticlericalism of anarchist worker leaders [Wolfe, 1991:818]. In Cuba, however, the population was decidedly less Catholic, so more readily responded to the iconoclasm disseminated by anarchists. As a result, Catholic worker groups in Cuba were short-lived. The UNT had professed their Catholic faith at two meetings with the CMO, whose sole organ, *Boletín Oficial de la Anunciata*, praised the UNT, calling it:

> ...una Agrupacación Obrera que pretende unir a todos los trabajadores de la República que aspira a su regeneración mediante los principios salvadores del Cristianismo (*a worker group which is trying to unite all those workers throughout the Republic, which aspires to its regeneration through the salvation of Christianity)* [Unidad Gastronómica, 1950, a]

Despite this overt appreciation of the UNT, Padre Camerero, determined to maintain the independence of his Congregation, did not join its ranks. The UNT was not deterred by that decision and, instead, searched for support elsewhere.

By 1924, the boycott of *La Polar* and the strike at its factory had become a matter of some concern both for the CCía and the Government: under Machado, the Government went on to persecute the union (see below). Perhaps for this reason, the UNT became involved in organising strike-breakers at the *La Polar* factory. It is curious, however, that a recently formed anti-clerical group, the Federación

Anticlerical Cubana (FAC), should join forces with the Catholic UNT in its attempt to bring the strike to a conclusion.

The FAC was founded in April 1924. It boasted the prominent Marxist student and future founding member of the Cuban Communist Party, Julio Antonio Mella, as its President, and the well-known anarchists Antonio Penichet and Adrián Del Valle as members of the Committee. The initial position of the FAC certainly appeared to have been wholly anticlerical. Article One of its Statutes declared:

> La Federación Anticlerical Cubana es una asociación cuyo fin primordial lo constituye la defensa de los principios liberales que rigen en los pueblos libres civilizados y la necesidad de contrarrestar en todos los campos que sea necesario, la labor en cuanto sea funesta del clero católico romano (*The Cuban Anticlerical Federation is an association whose primary goal is built around the defense of the liberal principles that govern free and civilized societies and shall, wherever necessary, undo the doomed work of the Roman Catholic Church)* [AN, FAC, 5].

Factions of the FAC, however, did not follow these guidelines and, from its foundation, the federation supported strikebreaking tactics at *La Polar.* The aforementioned ex-anarcho-syndicalist and, by 1924, reformist member of the café workers' union, Hilario Alonso, was Secretary of the FAC. Alonso had exchanged endless hostilities with E*l Progreso*, particularly concerning the *La Polar* boycott. In the April 3rd edition of *El Progreso*, he was accused of approaching CCía President, Zorrilla, reportedly asking him to allow the strike-breakers at the factory to organise under the banner of the UNT. *El Progreso* failed to understand how the FAC could have permitted such behaviour and urged the Federation to investigate the matter [*El Progreso*, 1924, m:1].

It appears that the Federación Anticlerical Cubana was a misnomer and its Statutes were entirely misleading. By May 1925, all trace of anarchist or Marxist membership of the Federation had disappeared, although Alonso remained on the Committee and

was joined by the Government employee and enemy of the radical elements in the labour movement, Juan Arévalo. According to *El Progreso*, both Arévalo and Alonso, along with fellow *amarillistas* Sabatés and Zapata, had helped to organise the newly denominated Sindicato Industrial de Cuba (SIC), an entity made up of strikebreaking elements at *La Polar* factory and supported by the administration of the CCÍa. The paper attacked these men for their betrayal of the working class, using them to illustrate that only such traitors would dare defy the union and its boycott of *La Polar*.

The SIC had splintered from the UNT in January 1925 "por considerarlo suficientemente capacitado para gobernarse por si solo" (*considering itself sufficiently able to govern itself*) [AN, SOIC: 4]. It was set up to counter the disruption caused at *La Polar* factory by the SGOIF and, like its adversary, the SIC was based in Puentes Grandes. The union aimed eventually to organise precisely those industrial workers who had been attracted to the SGOIF, including beer, chocolate, sweet and paper producers. However, the union's close relationship with employers appears to have limited its popularity among workers as, even after the demise of the SGOIF (and so in the absence of any other entity to represent workers in the manufacturing industry) the SIC struggled to gain support. In a letter to the Governor of the Province of Havana, SIC administration admitted that, due to a falling number of members, it could no longer afford to pay rent on its premises (AN, SOIC: 15). With the demise of the SGOIF, perhaps the main role for which the SIC was originally founded, to run the SGOIF into the ground, had ceased to exist. The push to organise workers in the manufacturing industry had thus lost its urgency for the SIC, which then became an invalid enterprise with nothing to fight against. In any case, in addition to illustrating the weakness of the SIC, the fact that workers did not flock to it emphasises the strength of the SGOIF. The SGOIF did not attract the support of workers simply because it was the only option available to them, but it appears that

its members really did share the union's radical outlook, as they were willing to join an openly anarcho-syndicalist union but not to a famously reformist one that began life as organiser of those who, it had hoped, would help to break SGOIF strikes.

Although the SGOIF tried to discourage strike-breaking, *El Progreso* did not verbally attack those acting as strike-breakers. Nor did it advocate violence against strike-breakers, although, on at least one occasion, there were reports of aggressive behaviour by union members. At *La Polar* beer factory, it was reported that a strike-breaker, one Ferreiro, had been threatened with a gun to his head if he did not quit his post. The incident was dismissed by the SGOIF as, it pointed out, the report came from a dubious source – a letter penned by the much maligned and frustrated company boss, Zorrilla. [*El Progreso*, 1923, j:2]. Periodically, however, writers in *El Progreso* did attempt to demoralise strike-breakers while simultaneously advertising union strength, in a hope to both halt work and attract potential new members. In November 1921, a list of strike-breakers was published in *El Progreso*, a ploy that aimed to name and shame "scab" labour and to deter further anti-strike action [*El Progreso*, 1921, t:2].

Rather than completely alienating potential allies, the periodical ordinarily did not place the blame on those workers struggling to make ends meet (even the strike-breakers had demanded higher wages [*El Progreso*, 1924, g:1].) They were seen to be the pawns of the organisers, and more vitriolic attacks were launched upon those responsible for the counter-organisation of industrial workers, the employers and the likes of Alonso, Arévalo and Zapata. Instead, workers were encouraged to join forces with the union:

> Decidle a vuestro amo que ya es hora que reconozca que es muy pequeño para luchar contra la solidaridad proletaria (*tell your boss that now is the time*

that he realises that he is too small to fight against proletarian solidarity)[*El Progreso*, 1924, s:2].

The end of the strike-boycott was due neither to waning support for the boycott, the strength of strike-breakers nor SGOIF weakness. The fight against *La Polar* factory and any goods made by the Compañía Cervecera came to a definite close as a result of the persecution of the workers during the early *Machadato* (see below, this chapter). Direct action in support of the boycott contributed to the Government's intolerance of the union and all it stood for, although it was by no means the sole cause of concern on the part of the Government. Sabotage, boycotts, strikes, murder and demonstrations for which the SGOIF were reportedly responsible were seen as a threat to order in Havana (other instances of revolutionary action taken by the union are discussed below). The study of the *La Polar* boycott illustrates the determination of the workers employed in the manufacturing industry in their struggle against the injustice experienced by the workers at the hands of just one company. The boycott was well supported by workers throughout the country (see above), and there is little evidence to suggest that the public was ever outraged by SGOIF behaviour. The opinion that the Cuban masses were against this direct action is derived from a study of the bourgeois and reformist worker press that wished to give the impression that the boycott was weak and unpopular.

For its part the SGOIF continued to state its case a week after the governmental decree of 16 September 1925 to suspend the manufacturers' union. Continuing the fight, the last issue of *El Progreso* reminded its readers "NO SOMOS ENVENENADORES" (*WE ARE NOT POISONERS)* [*El Progreso*, 1925, t:1].

Anarcho-Syndicalist Use of Sabotage and Violence

"Sabotage means to push back, pull out or break off the fangs of capitalism" confirmed "Big Bill" Haywood, a leading syndicalist organiser of the US branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and propagator of direct action. Syndicalist elements of the IWW were ardent propagators of the use of sabotage in the run-up to the General Strike and the subsequent demolition of the state. In its attempt to promote a mimetic "one big union" in Great Britain, the London based *Industrial Worker* traced the roots of the tactic:

> The term "Sabotage" is derived from the old and widespread habit of oppressed and badly paid workers, acting on the principle of "Poor or slow work for low wages" to deliberately lessen the quantity and quality of their products [*Industrial Worker*, 1913, a:1].

This definition of sabotage, however, was overshadowed by the use of spontaneous acts of violence and the wrecking of property and/or products by anarcho-syndicalists world-wide. David Miller explained:

> Sabotage was advocated as a way of harassing the employer without loss of pay, and as a means of preventing him from importing blacklegs to break a strike [Miller, 1986:126].

Workers were encouraged to use sabotage to air their grievances without, it was hoped, endangering their position as producers. However, Alfredo Bonanno has questioned whether the use of sabotage by workers could always be considered revolutionary as, in his opinion, the tactic can only be defined as anarchist depending on the conditions surrounding its use. He argued that, to be revolutionary, sabotage must be spontaneous. When acted out through union orders, on the other hand, it could never be anarchist in nature as anarchism allowed the workers themselves to

decide when the time was ripe for action and what form that action should take [Bonanno, 1998:40].

Spontaneous worker action involving sabotage was exemplified on Cuban railroads in 1924. The HFC, founded in Camagüey, was reformist, although not all railworkers shared the union's dedication to collaboration with employers. In February 1924 the sacking of two hundred railway employees following their participation in 1st May demonstrations resulted in the "21 days strike". Acts of sabotage ensued: fights broke out between strikers and strike-breakers, while dynamite was used in an attempt to destroy bridges. A telegram sent by the acting British Chargé d'Affaires in Havana informed London of a:

> ...strike on Cuban railroads which is now assuming alarming proportions owing to acts of violence. Brigadier Gen. Jack Manager of British Railway was shot through the head yesterday evening and is in grave danger.
>
> Have urgently requested Government to grant all protection possible to British personnel and property and suppress incitements to violence [FO 371/9538: A3223].

The following day, a second telegram reported that the Cuban Government had deployed troops to quell the unrest, and had even suppressed the local newspaper at the insistence of the British Consul [FO, 371/9538: A3561]. Mr Jack lived, although he resigned from his post. *Aurora* declared that some members of the HFC were "reformist" while others were "revolutionary". One such revolutionary was the anarcho-syndicalist leader Enrique Varona (see below). An organiser of rail and sugar workers in Morón, Camagüey, Varona constantly fought with members of the HFC committee in a bid to employ direct action over arbitration, although it is certain that the union would not have officially advocated violence as a means of reinstating workers. In fact, under the *Machadato,* in an attempt to polarise the movement, some leaders became agents of the police and the bourgeoisie. Thus, if this

sabotage was employed by workers and not by "secret agents", the attacks appear to have been, by Bonanno's definition, truly revolutionary acts.

The union most often accused by the Cuban authorities of illegality and the use of violence was the SGOIF. Through *El Progreso*, the union certainly advocated the use of violence in the war against capitalism, although whether it "ordered" workers to carry out specific attacks remains unclear. The union unequivocally considered sabotage to be a valid response to capitalism, but if SGOIF members were responsible for terrorism in Havana (as opposed to police agents) were they acting on their own initiative?

A Violent Means to a Peaceful End? Brewery Workers Wreak Havoc in Havana

On 21 August 1921, the Governor of the Province of Havana informed his superior[152] that a criminal investigation into the SGOIF had not borne fruit, as no detection of "foul play" by the brewers' union had been made and so no decree against the union could be issued [AN, 390/11694: 56]. Six months earlier, Rogelio Cavamés, an inspector with the Policía Especial (*Special Police*) had relayed his own findings on the union to the Provincial Secretary. He had visited union headquarters in order to verify claims that SGOIF members had been the protagonists of threatening behaviour towards factory owners. Reportedly, some brewery workers had warned employers that, unless they agreed to workers' demands, lawless tactics would be used against them (he failed to specify the nature of these tactics or the concessions sought) [AN, 390/11684: 46].

[152] In the Sindicato (General) Obrero de la Industria Fabril records, Registro de Asociaciones at the Archivo Nacional de Cuba, correspondence often appears between the Gobernador de Provincia de la Habana (Governor of the Province of Havana) and the Secretario de Gobernación (Secretary of State).

Cavamés believed that union conduct contradicted Article 9 of the Ley de Asociaciones *(Law of Association*) and Articles 1 and 5 of the Ley de Reuniones Públicas (*Law of Public Meetings*). However, after an inspection of the minutes book and the members' register and having interviewed various people, he found no apparent evidence of failure to adhere to public law. Despite this semblance of order, the authorities kept a watchful eye over union activities, inducing the SGOIF to continually accuse the police of persecution of the union, its members and workers in general.

In November 1920 the anarchists Antonio Penichet and Marcelo Salinas, not members of the SGOIF, were arrested and sentenced for three months for "el imaginario delito de coacción en una fábrica de gomas" at Puentes Grandes, Marianao... *(the imaginary crime of conspiracy at a tyre factory...)* [*El Progreso*, 1920: e]. Supposedly, the seditious meeting had led to the explosion of various bombs in parts of Havana. Salinas and Penichet were threatened with the death sentence for the dissemination of their radical views but, warned *El Progreso,* "...con ahorcar a Penichet y a Salinas, las ideas no mueren ni se lesionan en lo más mínimo" (*Hanging Penichet and Salinas will not kill the ideas nor hurt them in the slightest) [El Progreso*, 1920, e:1].[153]

In August 1921, the periodical reported a further 21 arrests (including, uncharacteristically, that of a woman, Ramona Penabad). The imprisoned were either part of *El Progreso*'s editorial team or SGOIF-associated factory workers or, it is supposed, both. They had been detained as:

> ...un petardo en las calles de la Habana, y la rotura de algunos vidrios, con su formidable estampido, colmó la medida para justificar al parecer un período de inicua violencia contra hombres de determinadas tendencias

[153] The two men were eventually freed.

> ideológicas (.....*a small explosion in the streets of Havana and the breaking of a few windows, with its formidable bang, seems to have justified a period of iniquitous violence against men of certain ideological tendencies)* [*El Progreso, 1921, n:1*].

For the next four years, until its final suppression in September 1925, *El Progreso*, insisted that it had never been the instigator of any violence in Havana. Union members, it maintained, were simply the product of authoritarian victimisation. It is interesting, therefore, that just a fortnight before the above article, the headline on Page One of *El Progreso* screamed "Queremos la paz, pero estamos preparados para la guerra" (*We want peace but we're prepared for war*)" [*El Progreso*, 1921: I]. "Hot off the press" news revealed that since consumer prices for beer and soft drink had recently been lowered, it followed that the wages of workers employed in the industry should also decrease. Despite the SGOIF's refusal to accept a drop in wages, the Nueva Fábrica de Hielo cut pay to 1919 levels and other companies looked set to follow suit. The SGOIF were ready to fight, although according to *El Progreso*, the union only combated such unjust treatment by their employers with strikes and boycotts while the secret police planted the bombs that would justify the imprisonment and deportation of union members.

Notwithstanding such claims, *El Progreso* could not be said to deter violence, as the very first issue in 1920 clarified:

> ...para el enemigo, armado y dispuesto a vencernos, debemos armarnos, para que así la lucha sea más o menos equilibrada; para la tiranía de arriba la tiranía de abajo " *(...to face the enemy, armed and ready to defeat us, we must arm ourselves, so that the fight is more or less equal; for the tyranny from above, tyranny from below) [El Progreso*, 1920, a:1].

and, it concluded:

> Ante un ejército, aunque inferior en número, no se puede ir a pretender vencerlo, desarmado. (*Before an army, although we are inferior in size, we cannot try to defeat it unarmed) [El Progreso,* 1920, a:1].

On the one hand, the periodical accused the powers-that-be of harassment and maltreatment, while on the other it propagated anti-authoritarian behaviour and openly declared itself to be anarchist:

> ¡Si, Soy Anarquista!
> El gobierno y la burguesía, con la cohorte de mercenario de la pluma y la detritus social – los esbirros y los chotes (sic) – se han puesto de acuerdo para eliminarnos, encarcelándonos arbitraria (sic) e injustamente, acusándonos de innumerables delitos que no hemos cometido.
> Ya sabéis, ¡Soy anarquista! ¿Queréis evitarlo? ¡Hacedlo! Pero no lo evitaréis encarcelándome.
> (*Yes I'm an anarchist!/ The govemment and the bourgeoisie, together with the mercenary, who uses his pen, and the social scum – the informers and the parasites – have agreed to eliminate us, arbitrarily and unjustly imprisoning us, accusing us of innumerable crimes that we have not committed/ You already know, I am an anarchist! Do you want to avoid this? Do it! But you will not avoid it by throwing me in jail*) [*El Progreso*, 1920, a:1].

As the use of violence spread so did the apportioning of blame, although *El Progeso* was outwardly convinced that conspiracy between the authorities and the bourgeoisie had been responsible for the sabotage of this boycotted product.

Hilario Alonso seemed convinced of the culpability of the SGOIF in its use of sabotage and violence:

> De todos son bien conocidos las demasías del "Sindicato Fabril" que se quería imponer el terror, no sólo a los patronos y a las autoridades, sino también, a los mismos obreros, que no compartían sus ideas. (*Everyone knows of the excesses of the Manufacturers' Union that wished to impose terror, not only on bosses and the authorities, but also on those very workers who did not share their ideas*) [Alonso, 1928:260].

It must be borne in mind that, at the time of this work, (written in 1925, but not published until 1928) Alonso was heavily pro-Government. In fact, he dedicated his book, *El Problema Social*, to General Machado, the President who, in his role of

Minister of the Interior, had been responsible for working-class repression as early as 1910, and who would ultimately repress the SGOIF into oblivion, helping to destroy anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba. Therefore, the reliability of Alonso's testament must be questioned. He was a "parasitical" *amarillista*, accused by the SGOIF of being a government employee, in collusion with bourgeois elements of society.

Doubtless, reformist union members wished to rid Cuba of its radical elements in order to gain a stronger foothold within the labour movement and in particular, the *amarillistas* aimed to discredit the SGOIF. However, condemnation of the use of violent direct action stemmed not only from pro-governmental entities but also from fellow libertarians. *Acción Consciente* denounced the use of the direct action so favoured by anarcho-syndicalists. The periodical was pacifist and believed violence to be counter-revolutionary. Unlike E*l Progreso*, the periodical was short-lived,[154] a fact that helps to illustrate the predominance of anarcho-syndicalism as the radical worker ideology in Cuba. *Acción Consciente* was used as an educational tool for moralistic anarchism rather than as a means to spur workers into action against their oppressors. It propagated naturism, vegetarianism, and free love, while condemning the Bolsheviks, violence and any form of centralised worker organisation. Of sabotage, someone writing under the pseudonym of *Le Vieux* declared:

> En nuestro concepto el empleo del sabotaje no es obra revolucionaria, ni útil, ni moral, y salve en algunos raros ocasiones, su aplicación es muy poco viril" (*In our opinion the use of sabotage is not a revolutionary act, it is neither useful, moral and, except in rare cases, its application is not very manly)* [*Acción Consciente,* 1922, a:1].

Whether or not the SGOIF was responsible for the majority of violent attacks committed in 1920s Havana, as it stood accused, the fact remains that it was "el organismo más combativo de esta etapa" (*the most combative organism of this era)*

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[154] *El Progreso*, on the other hand, survived five years of regular print and eventually folded, not due to unpopularity but government suppression.

[Palez Groba, 1991:63].[155] Through its mouthpiece, the union regularly declared itself to be anarcho-syndicalist, an ideology that certainly saw the use of sabotage as a means to achieving a state-free society. Refusal to admit itself party to violent occurrences in the capital was probably more to do with self-preservation than wishing to express condemnation of the tactic.

"The Bombing Campaign"

When, in 1923, numerous bombs exploded in Havana, fingers pointed to the SGOIF. An inventory of lawsuits filed against the union included no fewer than five infractions of the *Ley de Explosivos*, all committed within just a few months. The Chief of Police was convinced that the detonations were "verdaderas manifestaciones terroristas, siempre bajo la dirección del SGOIF" (*true terrorist protests, always under the direction of the SGOIF)* [AN, 390/11694: 89]. A bomb placed at Zorrilla's home led to the arrest, and subsequent release, of the prominent SGOIF member, Margarito Iglesias. Denying any role in the planting of the bomb, *El Progreso* suggested that Zorrilla himself was responsible for the sabotage of his own company products (fig.1 shows him fleeing a bomb explosion at the abandoned *La Polar* factory, while a mass of workers bear witness to his treachery).

During a strike against the Compañía Papelera Cubana, a bomb exploded at the home of the Deputy Secret Police-in-Chief. On the front page of *El Progreso*, under the headline "ACUSAMOS *(WE ACCUSE)* [*El Progreso*, 1923, o1:1], the editing team protested worker innocence:

> La bomba que explotó días pasados en una casa del segundo Jefe de la Policía Secreta, ha sido como fueron las de Puentes Grandes y "Habana-Madrid" viles recursos de la policía para poder ensañarse con determinados

[155] Paláez Groba referred to the 1917-1925 stage of the Cuban labour movement.

> trabajadores que luchan sin descanso para ilustrar a las masas y hacerles comprender la indignidad de este régimen de violencia y miseria....(*The bomb that exploded a few days ago at a house of the second chief of the secret police was, like those at Puentes Grandes and 'Habana-Madrid', vile means by the police to enable them to teach a lesson to those workers who fight tirelessly to enlighten the masses and to make them understand the indignity of this regime of violence and poverty) [El Progreso*, 1923, o1:1].

The explosion at "Habana-Madrid" cited above referred to the placing of two bombs at the "Habana-Madrid" café. Workers at the Compañía Cigarrera Cubana (*Cuba Cigarette Company*) [CCC] had been on strike and the SGOIF agreed to support workers by means of a boycott of CCC products. At the time of the blast, a number of strike-breakers employed by the company were at lunch at the café. Serious injuries occurred among them and the SGOIF was held responsible. Likewise a bomb placed at the cigarette factory *La Competidora Gaditana* drew the attention of the authorities, and once again accusations were directed towards Puentes Grandes, the home of the SGOIF. Aurelio Acosta, the Chief of Secret Police, had no doubt as to the identity of the authors of a planned countrywide bombing campaign:

> Este Sindicato (SGOIF), dirigido por expertos agitadores, se inmiscuye en cuantos conflictos obreros existen en todo el territorio de la República (*This union, headed by expert agitators, meddles in whatever worker conflict exists in the whole of the Republic's territory)* [AN, 390/11684:110]

Acosta labelled the accused a "nefasto group" (*evil group*) that still had a large quantity of explosives to hand and, if they had not yet been deployed, it was:

> ...precisamente por la estrecha vigilancia que les tiene establecida la Policía y nunca por falta de deseos (*...precisely due to the strict vigilance that the Police has subjected them to and never due to lack of desire*) [AN, 390/11694:110]

In September, 1925 the Government would use these damning police reports as the basis for the final suppression of both the SGOIF and *El Progreso*. Added to the

charges of sabotage, sedition, bombings, poisonings and generally causing public unrest, the union was accused of the greatest sin of all: murder.

Tyrannicide: the Killing of Don Felipe Fernández y Díaz Caneja

Early in January 1925, Felipe Fernández y Díaz Caneja, the Director of Ambrosia Industrial biscuit factory and President of the Centro Castellano de la Habana was fatally shot on the corner of Flores and Agua Dulce in the neighbourhood of Cerro in Havana. The factory was the workplace of a number of SGOIF members who had previously instigated strikes, complaining of maltreatment, lack of hygiene and low wages, strikes backed by the union. Worker demands were usually met by the company but, on the eve of Machado's accession to power, a strike in the biscuit department of Ambrosia Industrial ended in cold-blooded murder.

On 20 December 1924, an SGOIF member, Marcelo Navarro was made redundant by the ill-fated Fernández y Díaz Caneja "por causas de economía" (*for economic reasons*) [AN, 390/11684:90]. Two days after the sacking, the SGOIF declared a strike against the Ambrosia Company. Twelve other workers, all union members, were subsequently laid off by the director. The factory boss had therefore transformed the protest into a lockout and, although the SGOIF stubbornly insisted that it was still exercising a strike against the company, in reality their declared action made little difference to the company's production and regular output continued. Apparently, the union felt ridiculed by the fact that strike action had not had the desired outcome and that its struggle was effectively being ignored. The company did eventually agree to reinstate the workers, but union success was secured at the highest price. Fernández y Díaz Caneja was already dead and the police were convinced of SGOIF's complicity in the killing of the company boss:

> ...la muerte violenta del Señor Felipe Fernández y Díaz Caneja ..... es el producto de un acuerdo de la dirección de dicho Sindicato (*the violent death of Señor Felipe Fernández y Díaz Caneja .... . is the product of an agreement by the leadership of the aforementioned union)* [AN, 390/11684:90].

Four members of the SGOIF were initially accused of his murder. The Cubans Julio Herrera y Ortega and Margarito Iglesias y Oven and one unnamed Spaniard were arrested for conspiracy to murder, while the Andalusian José Rodríguez y Villar was charged with the act of firing the fatal shot. The two Cuban "aggressors" were arrested on the basis of a conversation overheard by one Estela Vega. The young worker had reportedly been at SGOIF headquarters at no.869 Calzada del Cerro, when she heard Iglesias tell Herrera that "se encargaría acabar con Don Felipe" (*he would be entrusted to "do away with" Don Felipe*) [AN, 390/11684: 90]. An involved and active member of the SGOIF, Iglesias had been subject to police arrests on numerous occasions. As always, he escaped conviction and was released within a matter of days. As regards Herrera, the deceased had informed police that he had been in daily contact with him as an employee and union delegate. Furthermore, Herrera had been spotted in the vicinity of Flores and Agua Dulce at around the time of the assassination.

A 24-year-old from Huelva, José Rodríguez y Villar was seen fleeing from the scene of the crime and, after pursuing him, the police conducted a body search, uncovering "la pistola disparada" (*the pistol that had been used)* and bullets [AN, 390/11684:90]. Despite such incriminating evidence, *El Progreso* professed his innocence, declaring that he was simply scared and therefore ran. Not having been an employee at *Ambrosia*, he had no reason to detest, let alone kill, its director, it maintained. In any case, the SGOIF was still in the educational and propagandist stages of the Revolution, it insisted, and the shooting had nothing to do with the union. The situation was "lamentable" but:

> ...el atentado es una expresión de la venganza individual. Cuando se generaliza, recibe el nombre de revolución armada, y en esto no han pensado aun nuestras instituciones. (*The attack is an expression of individual vengeance. When it becomes general it is called armed revolution, and our institutions have not even considered this). [El Progreso*, 1925, d:1].

The SGOIF argued that for this reason the union was still in existence and that the survival of the organisation depended on its innocence in such violent matters. Interestingly, the periodical reported the end of the strike a week before it mentioned Fernández y Díaz Caneja's death, although the killing occurred at the very least five days before the strike was resolved. The justification for the delay was that they had needed to make a calm and detached analysis of the shooting. The authorities were little convinced.

The SGOIF had always denied culpability in violent crimes while simultaneously propagating violence as a means of attaining Utopia. After all, it proclaimed: "El verdadero revolucionario es un ilegal por excelencia" (*The true revolutionary is the ultimate illegal)* [*El Progreso*, 1924, a1:1].

The Bitter End: The Closure of the SGOIF

Accusations of violence and murder were instrumental in the closure of the SGOIF. In his final condemnation of the union, the judge, Augusto Saladrigas y Lunar, offered nothing short of an inventory of judicial cases against it. From 1922 to 1925, the union faced at least fourteen charges of either murder or the placing of bombs. Cases such as the poisoning at *La Polar* and the killing of Don Felipe Fernández had certainly contributed to governmental intolerance while helping to legitimise its actions. In the resolution printed in *Boletín Oficial*, on 16th September 1925, the

Provincial Governor of Havana, Antonio Ruiz, catalogued the numerous violent acts for which the union was being held responsible.[156]

Notwithstanding these allegations, it is interesting to note that the SGOIF was seen not only as a menace to society but also a real threat to the very existence of the *Machadato.* The union was not alleged to be the only culprit, however, and the government was convinced that a number of radical worker newspapers:

> ...no son más que órganos de anarquía, opuestos a la moral y la tranquilidad del país ..... que insulta(n) a las autoridades y ataca el régimen establecido[157] (*...are nothing more than organs of anarchy, opposed to the morality and tranquillity of the country.... that insult the authorities and attack the established regime)* [AN, 390/11684:110].

While the periodicals disseminated radical thought, worker association posed an even greater problem. Governmental correspondence maintained that two unions in particular, the SGOIF and the FOH, had been created under the illusion that they adhered to public law when in reality they were illegal entities that:

> ....no tenían otros fines que los de la anarquía y el colectivismo y dirigían aquellos atentados, con grave daño del órden y de la tranquilidad pública, amenazan, inclusive, a la integridad nacional y régimen de gobierno, amenazas que en otros paises se han convertido en tristes realidades ... (*had no other ends than anarchy and collectivism and they organised those attacks, with grave damage to order and public peace, they also threaten national integrity and the rule of the government; threats that in other countries have been transformed into sad realities...*) [AN, 390/11684:107].

These "sad realities" were also observed by Alonso, who cited the examples of Spain and Italy where worker rebellions had, he argued, provoked the rise of the ultra right-wing leaders Primo de Rivera and Mussolini, respectively. Likewise, direct action

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[156] Among the charges he listed: 961 de 1923, 1200 de 1923, 749 de 1923, 761 de 1923, 1976 de 1925, 1121 de 1925, 465 de 1925 and 1161 de 1925 for counts of sabotage; 1839 de 1922 and 1205 de 1925 for counts of poisoning; 1541 de 1925 and 1544 de 1925 for sedition and 61 de 1925 for assassination. [AN, 390/11684: 120].

[157] Periodicals noted included *El Progreso, Nueva Luz, Educación Obrera, ¡Tierra!* and *Justicia.*

had resulted in worker repression by the authorities in the USA and Argentina. Such tactics, he insisted, were disastrous for workers: "...la acción directa no produce más que víctimas" (*direct action produces nothing but victims*) [Alonso, 1928:240]

In September 1925, many of these "victims" were to be found within the ranks of the SGOIF. The judicial case for the closure of the union and its mouthpiece listed 42 known members of the union. A further eleven names appeared on a declaration by factory owners, accusing the unionists of using threatening behaviour towards them. All named members, insisted the lawyer Saladriga y Lunar, were to be provisionally detained at Güines Prison, pending $500 bail[158] [AN, 390/11684:131]. "Pernicious foreigners" had already been expelled from Cuba and other union members, presumably Cuban, were serving jail sentences.

Evidence against the alleged saboteurs was weak, however, and for this reason many had been or, it was hoped, would be charged with lesser crimes. The union had been consistent in its illegality, according to the authorities who were unsettled by the frequent changes to the address of the union's headquarters: minute books and union documents had not been made available for inspection (although meetings had been held). The authorities also upheld that leaders had forced their will onto associates, demanding subscriptions of up to one peso although no official record of expenditure was produced [AN, 390/11684:131].[159]

In fact, *El Progreso* regularly published expenditure summaries under the heading *NOTAS ADMINISTRATIVAS*. The bulk of subscriptions either helped to support the rationalist school set up in Puentes Grandes or was spent on the printing and distribution of up to 5,000 copies weekly of *El Progreso*. Separate, specific

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[158] The accused protagonists of the *La Polar* poisoning, Angel Arias, Eduardo Rivera and Luis Quiros appeared on these lists.
[159] In fact, subscriptions to the union were, according to union statutes, ¢40.

collections were made and fund nights were held to ensure that any striking or imprisoned members received financial assistance. The SGOIF openly published the results of meetings and no apparent secrecy surrounded union meetings or subsequent resolutions made. As Malatesta pointed out, the unavoidably public nature of newsprint obliged radical periodicals to reveal inner workings, even to the adversary. Nevertheless, he argued, "...there are situations in which the enemy must not be informed" [Malatesta, *Umanitá Nova,* 27/02/1920]. It is likely that information acquired by government officials was restricted to the consultation of such newspapers and it is also probable that articles published may well have concealed information that the union held to be sensitive or damaging to it and its members.

That the SGOIF often failed to communicate directly with the authorities (and through the legitimate channels) led the courts to accuse it of being a covert, and therefore illegal, operation. Such behaviour made government surveillance of the union difficult and, besides, it contradicted the Law of Association and those violating Cuban Law, while being liable to prosecution, left themselves open to investigation by the authorities.

In its antepenultimate edition, *El Progreso* condemned what amounted to persecution of union members. Reporting the victimisation experienced by <u>all</u> SGOIF associates, it observed the brutality imposed by the authorities:

> Hemos visto como las garras de la policía, caían sobre nuestros hermanos de fatiga arrancándolos de sus hogares y del taller para ser conducidos al barco que los llevará a otras playas; otros hermanos quedan aún enerrado en la cárcel acusados del horrendo crimen de ser trabajadores y de luchar para mejorar la miserable vida del trabajador.... (*We have seen how the clutches of the police have come down upon our tired brothers, tearing them from their homes and from the factories in order to lead them to the boat that will take them to other shores; other brothers are still locked up in prison, accused of*

the terrible crime of being workers and of fighting to improve the miserable life of the worker....) [*El Progreso*, 1925, s:1].

That the SGOIF had broken the law of the Republic was sufficient reason to detain and/or deport recalcitrant unionists. Government disapproval of SGOIF behaviour was substantiated in a communiqué to them detailing the utter disgust of fellow workers towards the union. In a letter of complaint to the Secretary of Law, the UNT accused SGOIF members of violently pressurising non-interested workers into accepting anarchistic and terrorist practices [AN, 390/11684: 89]. The UNT was itself keen to organise strike-breakers and, more importantly, it was a government tool that hoped to smash the power of the SGOIF, a detail that overshadowed the reliability of the testimony.

Contrary to the UNT's letter, during late May and early June 1925, telegrams of support for the SGOIF reached the Governor of Havana, Antonio Ruiz. The island over, unions unrelated by trade pleaded that the government show leniency and that it avoid outlawing the manufacturers' union.[160] To Severino Díaz, President of El Comité de Braceros y Estivadores de Puerto Tarafa, Nuevitas, Ruiz replied that since the government treated all registered associations with respect, the SGOIF would not be subjected to any unjust treatment [AN, 390/11684: 103]. Just days before, however, the chief of Police had labelled the union as having neither "...un funcionamiento normal ni lícito" (*... a normal nor legal function)* [AN, 390/11684:112]. That the union should be suppressed had already been decided.

[160] Telegrams were sent by: the Unión Obrero Ferrocarril, Guantánamo, 14/06/1925, [AN, 390/11684: 100], El Comité de Braceros y Estivadores de Puerto Tarafa, Nuevitas, 30/05/1925 [AN, 390/11684: 102] and from Banes, 01/06/1925 [AN, 390/11684: 108]

The "Mussolini of the Caribbean"[161] Puts his House in Order

> Since the new President assumed office in May last, there has been a marked improvement in the government of Cuba ... a genuine attempt is now being made to administer the country [FO, 371/11138: A3178/14].

So ran a 1926 communication between the British Consul in Havana and the Foreign Office in London. At the time of writing, a public works programme was being prepared when, under the new government, some $300 million would be pumped into improving infrastructure in Cuba. According to the British Consul, President Machado displayed "...good sense, moral wisdom and ... great simplicity".[162] Of course, the structural improvement of Cuban roads, buildings and ports would benefit any foreign interests on the island, as would the quelling of a rebellious workforce. Machado ensured both.

Whereas the Zayas administration had exercised relative leniency towards the labour movement, the *Machadato* would prove ruthless [Page, 1952:57]. The workers of Cuba were already familiar with Gerardo Machado, having achieved infamy among them many years before his ascendancy to President of the Republic. During his reign as Secretary of State, the anarchist periodical *¡Tierra!* dubbed him *Machadito* (*Little* Machado) as "lo consideramos muy pequeño e impotente" *(we consider him to be very little and powerless*) [*¡Tierra!*, 1911: d]. He expelled a number of "agitators" following the 1911 strike by sewer workers in Havana, which infuriated the newspaper:[163]

> A la mayoría del pueblo ha sorprendido la acometida brusca e inesperada, en plena paz, del Secretario de Gobernación contra nosotros. (*The brusque and*

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[161] Referring to President Machado, the phrase was coined in a manifesto by the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (PPC), published in the Mexican Communist organ *El Machete*, 16/09/1926, in light of the cruelty inflicted by Machado. [IMSRSC, a, 1985: 244].
[162] Annual Report, Cuba, 1926, Mr Morris to Sir Austin Chamberlain, [FO 371/11991:A744/14].
[163] For more information on this strike see Aguirre 1965: 98-100 and this thesis, Chapter 1.

> *unexpected attack against us by the Secretary of State, where peace had reigned, took the majority of the people by surprise)* [*¡Tierra!* 1911, d:1].

Machado employed strike-breakers to quash the protest and although strikers' demands were not met, *¡Tierra!* felt that solidarity had strengthened in the face of adversity:

> Estamos de enhorabuena los anarquistas, porque el autocrático y dictador Machado está resultando inconscientmente el gran propagandista de nuestro ideal de saneamiento universal. (*Anarchists are in luck since the autocratic dictator, Machado, is unconsciously acting as the great propagator of our ideal of a universal clean-up*) [*¡Tierra!*, 1911, e:1].[164]

If the "autocratic" Machado had helped to promote the anarchist cause in 1911, his tyrannical actions in 1925 would have the reverse effect, when Machado's administration purged the labour movement of overtly radical elements, the SGOIF being one of the largest casualties:

> Machado se declaraba desde el principio adversario del sindicalismo y escogía como campo de batalla lo que constituía el arma única de defensa de los trabajadores (*From the beginning Machado declared himself an adversary to syndicalism and he chose as his battle ground that which constituted the workers' only means of defence*) [Córdova, 1997:150].

In September 1925, the SGOIF was suspended and *El Progreso* was closed, becoming the major focus of Machado's clean-up plan. According to the government-sponsored "worker" periodical *Acción Socialista*, it was inevitable that the union be dissolved as it had proved to be harmful to Cuban society and to workers:

> Mataron en la clase trabajadora el afecto a la familia, a la patria, a la justicia y a la orden (*Among the working class, they destroyed love for the family, the motherland, justice and order*) [*Acción Socialista*, 1926, f:1].

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[164] The use of "sanaemiento", also meaning sewerage, may be a play on words - the strike demanded a rise in wages and an improvement of safety and hygiene for the sewerage workers.

The "dangerousness" of the union, echoed by police reports, justified an all-out war against it. According to Calixto Masó, the poisonings at *La Polar* acted as Machado's pretext "para atacar con ferocidad el movimiento obrero"(*to attack ferociously the labour movement*) [Masó, 1964: 75].

On April 24th, 1925, Machado attended a lunch given by the President of the American Sugar Refining Co. at the Bankers Club of New York, a banquet that attracted more than forty U.S. businessmen, the majority being sugar company bosses. In his speech, Machado assured the diners that "there are sufficient forces to repress all disorder" [Thomas, 1998:572]. He was true to his word. The right to detain wayward Cubans and to extradite "pernicious foreigners" was exercised as more than 500 workers, "principally of the new SGOIF", received such treatment [Page, 1952: 63]. Workers who managed to evade deportation or imprisonment escaped to Florida or Yucatán, while others faced assassination [Fernández, 2000:65].

Such was the destiny of Catalonian worker José Cuxart Faljons. The "destacado dirigente obrero" (*outstanding worker leader*) [Paláez Groba, 1991:6], a member of the SGOIF, was arrested on suspicion of preparing a plot to assassinate General Machado. On 1st October 1925, Cuxart was steered towards the prison of Forteleza de la Cabaña, where he was shot in the back. His assassins were legally permitted to murder their prisoner since the "ley de fuga" (*law of escape)*[165] applied, Cuxart apparently being shot while trying to escape.

Margarito Iglesias also perished at the hands of Machado's henchmen, becoming one of those Cuban workers to be imprisoned following the closure of the union. Iglesias had long been a thorn in the side of the authorities and had been arrested on

[165] The Ley de Fuga stipulated that a detainee could be shot in the back by the authorities while attempting to escape.

numerous occasions although, following each release, the Pinareño[166] returned to Puentes Grandes, where he never failed to secure a leading role in the union. Furthermore, he had been accused of conspiracy in the murder of Fernández y Díaz Caneja and of other terrorist acts throughout Havana. This "dangerous and rebellious" black Cuban mysteriously disappeared in 1927, an event that, according to Cuban anarchist Frank Fernández, helped to throw the national workers' union, the Confederación Nacional Obrera Cubana (CNOC) into crisis [Fernández, 2000:65]. His remains were located in late August 1933, days after the fall of Machado.

Iglesias's corpse was exhumed along with that of fellow Cuban Alfredo López. At a conference at the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC) commemorating the 48th anniversary of his death, the historian Fabio Grobart hailed López "...una de las figuras más amadas de los trabajadores y más destacadas en la historia del movimiento obrero cubano" (*...one of the figures most loved among workers and most prominent in the history of the Cuban labour movement*) [Grobart, 1974]. One of the founders of the Asociación de Tipógrafos en General (*General Association of Printers*) and subsequent president of the union, López had been among the most prominent anarcho-syndicalists in Cuba. "El factor aglutinante" (*The cohesive factor*) [Fernández, 2000: 61] of the FOH from its foundation, he became Secretary General in 1925. López also played a key role in the formation of the CNOC and, of the August 1925 National Congress, the Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba observed:

> El alma del congreso y de la central sindical en él creada, fue el destacado dirigente obrero Alfredo López. (*The soul of the congress, and of the central union created within it, was the prominent worker leader Alfredo López)* [IHMCRSC, b, 1985:407].

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[166] From Pinar del Rio in the west of Cuba.

López had supported the SGOIF boycott of *La Polar*, helping to organise meetings in various parts of Havana and in Güines, in an attempt to rally support for the brewery workers. In vain, he protested furiously against the fierce repression of the SGOIF and very shortly afterwards was arrested himself on suspicion of installing bombs in the Capital. On his release in January 1926, López continued to voice his disgust at government handling of innocent workers, and in particular of the persecution of SGOIF members. He chaired an illegal meeting in support of the union, which he fully hoped to reorganise. He was duly rearrested and taken to the Chief of Secret Police (*la Porra*), Desiderio Ferreira, who reportedly advised him "que dejara eso si quería conservar la vida *(...that he drop it if he wished to live*) [Grobart, 1974].[167] Unrelenting, López organised yet another "asamblea de los fabriles" (*meeting of factories*), which was suspended on the orders of Ferreira. Having once again received threats from government officials, López headed to the Police headquarters to report that he had been denied his individual liberties. On 27th July 1926, the popular worker leader was snatched from outside his home on his way to a meeting at the "Centro Obrero" and he was escorted to Castillo de Atarés, where he was tortured and finally murdered. It has been widely accepted that López met his grisly end as a result of his unbending desire to reorganise the manufacturers' union.

López had arguably been the most outspoken and charismatic anarcho-syndicalist of both the FOH and the CNOC. His absence deprived the workers' organisations of an orator fired with the determination to fight the state through economic struggle, disregarding the ballot box as a tool of the oppressor. His dream to help found a national workers' union was finally realised in 1925, although he would not live to witness the Confederation's metamorphosis into a communist redoubt.

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[167] "eso" referred to meetings in support of the SGOIF.

While *La Porra* harassed workers in the city, the Rural Guard attended to undesirables in the country, where sugar workers received the brunt of rural discipline. Following the 1926 kidnapping-to-ransom of sugar boss, Enrique Piña Jiménez, a friend of Machado, punishment fell on a group of Canary Islanders in Ciego de Avila. Page reported that some 200 islanders were "lynched and hanged" [Page, 1952:63], while a more conservative estimate has put the figure at 40 [IHMCRSC, a, 1985:233]. Worker leaders in the Interior were also targeted:

> Con López y Varona asesinados, los anarchosindicalistas perdían en un momento clave de nuestra historia, a dos de sus más valiosos orientadores, y la clase obrera a dos luchadores serenos y valientes (*With López and Varona assassinated, the anarcho-syndicalists lost, in a key moment in our history, two of its most valuable advisors, and the working class two calm and brave fighters)* [Fernández, 2000:65].

In rural Cuba the prestigious anarcho-syndicalist Enrique Varona González met his bloody end in September 1925. *El Progreso* regularly protested at the government's treatment of these workers: some were threatened with expulsion while others, including Varona, were imprisoned, it recorded. In September 1924, the periodical published a manifesto condemning authoritarian attacks on workers at Morón and pleaded for solidarity between urban and rural workers. However, the fight did not reach truly sanguinary proportions until the summer of 1925. Until then, it seems sugar workers had been faced with mainly empty threats. A few foreign workers were to be deported, claimed *El Progreso* but not because they were the principal instigators of the workers' movement against the Cuban government and US capitalism. Instead, it insisted that a handful of Spaniards was being falsely labelled "pernicious" and threatened with expulsion in an attempt to intimidate other workers into returning to the mills [*El Progreso,* 1924, s1:1] .

From August 1925 repression in rural Cuba was severe. Scores of foreign sugar workers were expelled from Cuba while many Cuban-born workers were imprisoned.

Varona was just one of those to be assassinated following renewed strikes in three sugar mills belonging to the United States-owned Cuban Cane Sugar Corporation. General Gerado Machado had been the President of the Republic for less than four months.

Persecution: The Beginning of the End of Anarcho-Syndicalism in Cuba

Page described the closure of the SGOIF and *El Progreso* as a "body-blow" to anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba [Page, 1952: 62]. Córdova agreed:

> "...la pérdida de uno de los reductos del anarquismo ..es probable que contribuy(ó) al declive posterior del anarquismo" *(...the loss of one of the strongholds of anarchism ...is probably that which contributed to the ultimate decline of anarchism)* [Córdova, 1997:140].

The general consensus is that the union was closed due to its intransigence in the *La Polar* affair. The fact that the SGOIF refused to end the four-year strike/boycott infuriated the authorities, especially after Machado had guaranteed foreign interests in Cuba that business need not fear disorder on the Island.

The SGOIF had been a combative force in Havana and through its use of direct action and endless propaganda, it had become a threat to both the authorities and capitalist interests. Finally, intolerance of the anarcho-syndicalist union forced Machado and his *Porra* to take decisive action against it. Examples of illegal behaviour and non-adherence to the laws of association afforded the authorities a justification to purge the country of rebellion. Although the SGOIF had been seen as the principal menace to economic and social stability, the *Machadato* declared an all-out-war on other actual or potential insurgents. Those who stood accused usually had some link to the union, however tenuous.

That workers in rural areas of Cuba had become more vociferous since the autumn of 1924 must have unnerved the authorities. Although the September to December strike by sugar workers in Camagüey had not secured total victory through direct action, it pointed towards growing discontent in the countryside.[168] Having been closed in 1914, the anarchist periodical *¡Tierra!* was revived in August 1924 and the plight of the strikers in Camagüey was passionately recorded in both ¡*Tierra!* and *El Progreso*. The country had to unite in its fight against oppression, observed both periodicals. Of the struggle at Central "Piña" in Morón, *El Progreso* cried:

> ¡Trabajadores! ¡Ha llegado el momento de que deis prueba de que sois hombres! ¡Qué nuestra protesta, nuestra acción, no se haga esperar! (*Workers! The moment has come in which you must prove that you are men! Our protest, our action, will not wait!) [El Progreso*, 1924, j1:1].

This call to arms attempted to fuse real worker action in the city with discontent in the Interior, the SGOIF appearing to have detected an authentic possibility of combining urban and rural worker forces and, during *El Progreso's* last year of print, the predicament of the sugar workers managed to overshadow news of the boycott at *La Polar*. The government saw the SGOIF as the most radical of associations in the country and so its support of uprisings outside of its own industrial sphere would not have been a welcome interference. Therefore, those individuals who had either a direct connection or merely shared an affinity with the union, such as López, were targeted.

The foundation of the CNOC was certainly a watershed in the history of the working-class movement, as never before had workers in Cuba been united through a single national entity.[169] However, the absence of representatives from sugar regions at the

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[168] According to John Dumoulin, the workers secured at 10% increase in wages rather than the 30% originally demanded, and acknowledgement of union delegates [Dumoulin, 1991:50].
[169] Only twice before had a national conference been staged. In August 1914, President Menocal organised a National Worker Congress which was condemned by anarchists as a "farsa comedia" ("comedic farce"), see *El Dependiente*, 1914: g. A further Congress was held in Havana in April 1920 in order to discuss high cost of living. The main resolution of this Congress was the decision, pressed by

Congress was notable (see chapter 4). At its August gathering, the CNOC arranged for a collection to be made that would help financially those workers in Camagüey detained by the state as a result of strike action. One of the prisoners was Enrique Varona, who, a few weeks after the resolution was made, was murdered on his way to the cinema with his family. The loss of one of the most ardent propagators of anarcho-syndicalism in rural Cuba handicapped the movement there, as did the incarceration, extradition, murder or exile of hundreds of workers. Similarly, the campaign in Havana had suffered. The "disappearance" of Alfredo López in 1926 had only exacerbated the situation.

Although attended by anarchists, reformists and communists, anarcho-syndicalist thought did initially influence the consciousness of CNOC members and the agreements reached in Congress undoubtedly displayed a bias towards anarcho-syndicalist ideals. The purge of radicalism exercised by Machado, however, left a vacuum that, as Fernández noted, was duly filled by the ever-strengthening communists:

> "La situación fue hábilmente aprovechada por los marxistas dentro de la CNOC, y por órdenes del PCC se empezaron a apropiar de los cargo sindicales ostentados por los anarquistas muertos, deportados, encarcelados o en el destierro" *(Marxists within the CNOC easily benefited from the situation, and through PCC {Communist Party} orders started to appropriate union seats held by dead, deported, imprisoned or exiled anarchists)* [Fernández, 2000:65].

Communism did not suffer the same fate as its leftist rival. The nascent party had not yet penetrated worker unions. This meant that although the PCC had to struggle for recognition and acceptance among workers, it also enjoyed a period of near invisibility among officials:

Secretary López, not to send a Cuban delegate to the "yellow" Pan-American Worker Congress in Mexico later that year, see chapter 1.

> Machado y sus colaboraodres olvidaban que los comunistas normalmente no ponían bombas sino que utilizaban otros métodos de lucha que a largo plazo eran más peligrosos (*Machado and his collaborators forgot that communists did not normally place bombs but instead used other methods of struggle that, in the long run, were more dangerous)* [Córdova, 1997:51]

Those "alternative methods" referred to by Córdova included the communist system of organising clandestinely and in cells. The absence of experienced orators and the removal of sympathisers culminated in a downwards spiral for anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba, which was eventually (and rather quickly) replaced by communism. Although anarcho-syndicalism did not disappear "overnight", the extermination of the SGOIF and individuals linked to it contributed in no small way to its demise. Although anarchist-related thought did not entirely evaporate, it never again enjoyed the privilege of being at the forefront of radical labour in Cuba.

Conclusion

To assume that the eclipse of anarcho-syndicalism by communism was part of a teleological process is too simplistic. True, socio-economic and political conditions in Cuba during the early twentieth century necessitated the espousal of an ideology by working-class activists that responded to those conditions. Likewise, the earlier ideological shift from a more orthodox form of anarchism to the relative pragmatism of anarcho-syndicalism was a reaction to a changing reality in the workplace, in particular. However, anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba did not disappear simply because it had served its purpose, allowing communism to snugly fill its place in the hearts and minds of the populace. Rather, the SGOIF failure to organise on an even larger scale than it had by the mid-1920s, repression used by the government, the union's slow response to a changing society and emphasis placed on the wrong issues, all contributed to its downfall.

The appeal of anarcho-syndicalism lay partly in its inclusiveness. Initially imported to Cuba by some Spanish workers during the late nineteenth century, anarchism was embraced by Spanish and Cuban workers alike and collectivism was the most popular strain of anarchism in Cuba around this time, as it was in Spain. The need to form worker unions that would act as a breeding ground for these ideas was already seen as an important step in the education of the workers.

Although anarchism did enter into worker consciousness in the sugar regions of Cuba, in particular in Cruces, the main thrust of anarcho-syndicalism was found in

the emerging industrial areas of Havana during the early twentieth century and it was particularly appealing to workers who not only felt that they were being treated harshly but who often had first-hand experience of the mal-distribution of wealth, such as barmen and waiters. Subjected to long hours, poor wages and unhealthy living conditions, service industry workers sought a change in the treatment they received at work, demanding short-term gains. Through necessity, these workers fought for an improved standard of living, bemoaning the squalor in which they were forced to live and work, although they also aspired to a brighter future, that is they strove for improvements in the long-term.

These improvements, many believed, could be achieved through education and especially through the instruction of naturism as, they maintained, a healthy body would be more able to cope with the drudgery of daily life, while the financial savings made on vices such as alcohol could be channelled into a healthier lifestyle for all the family. The juxtaposition of short and long term gains is one of the characteristics of all anarchist-related thought. What was more remarkable about the form of anarchism prevalent among service industry workers was the blend of the collectivist anarcho-syndicalism with the more individualistic anarcho-naturism.

However, this crossover should be no surprise, considering that the abuses and effects of alcohol and food were probably witnessed everyday in the workplace, particularly by those who served wealthier Cubans and tourists in the more expensive cafés, restaurants and hotels, leading to a desire by some workers to reverse this trend (besides it was one they could ill-afford) and to embrace a cleaner way of life. In this way, some workers adopted such remedies as sun-worship, vegetarianism, teetotalism and yoga and it was through the long-established unions that, it was hoped, such instruction could be received.

Unions dedicated to service industry workers had existed before the War of Independence, making them some of the oldest unions in urban Cuba, and so it was natural that anarcho-naturists aimed to spread the word through these instruments of learning and solidarity. The unions' espousal of anarcho-syndicalism over socialism or reformism was partly the result of disenfranchisement, which invalidated the former, while the perceived abuses of power displayed by politicians and employers did not make either a convincing alternative. Direct action was propagated in periodicals and social gatherings, such as vigils, conferences, open days and meetings. Writers and speakers told of the need to fight employers with boycotts and strikes (open-mouth sabotage was a particularly popular tool among waiters).

While the horrors of the Great War were becoming apparent, there was a definite strengthening of moralistic attitudes in urban Cuba but, at the same time, the fear of rising war-time prices and a subsequent fall in real wages convinced some to pool resources to prevent an even lower standard of living than was already a reality in 1914. Writers in *El Dependiente* pleaded that workers join forces and form along industrial lines, rather than continue to be separated by the type of work undertaken (chef or waiter, for example) or by place of work (café or restaurant). And so, individualistic moralism and naturism fused with ideas of industrial unionism, as some attempted to increase the solidarity and protection offered to all workers by dismantling existing unions and replacing them with one big union of the food and drink branch (Ramo Gastronómico).

This was partly a response to the growth of manufacturing industry during the 1910s and, with it, a workforce that began to voice discontent early on, as illustrated by two spontaneous strikes declared by workers at the *Tropical* Brewery in 1913, both of which attracted the sympathy of other unions all over Cuba. These strikes were the first instances of direct action displayed by workers in a nascent but quickly

expanding industry. The *Tropical* strikes were coupled with boycotts, so characteristic of the, as yet, unfounded SGOIF, and were supported by equally typical demonstrations and meetings. This spontaneous worker action attracted country-wide solidarity for those industrial workers who, like the SGOIF, employed violence where it was deemed necessary. The failure of the strikers at *Tropical* was mostly due to a heavy reliance on spontaneous action and the lack of a solid organisation, a setback that, it was hoped, would be rectified with the legal foundation of the SGOIF, four years later.

Tax breaks offered to certain factories in Cuba, such as those producing beer, soap and cement, were perhaps an effort by the government to create an import substitution industry in a country where the majority of necessary goods came from abroad, at a time when some products were in short supply (and so available at inflated prices) as a direct result of the War. In any case, manufacturing industry did experience a growth period and employed thousands of new workers who, due to the low-skilled nature of many of their jobs, were often mobile and easily replaceable in the factories, the majority of which were centred in and around the Havana neighbourhood of Puentes Grandes.

Industrial workers needed to respond, firstly, to companies who employed them on a larger-scale than previously and, secondly, to an industry that had no need for highly skilled workers and could replace strikers without difficulty. Both necessitated a more solid form of organisation among workers, in the shape of a union that would represent all workers, regardless of the tasks performed by individuals. Moreover, the demographic concentration of urban workers fortified contact among them and so solidarity was able to flourish. The setting up of the SGOIF in the hub of worker activity, Puentes Grandes, in 1917, was an appropriate response to those conditions.

At the end of the Great War, the pull towards industrial unionism far outweighed individualistic trends as the forging of a network of worker solidarity that could match the might of more powerful employers was considered more urgent. Bearing witness to the growing influence of foreign power in the factories and mills of Cuba's two most economically important products, sugar and tobacco, workers in the breweries, initially, aimed to get the advantage over big business by organising a union that could truly match it. However, the realisation that one big union was needed in Cuba was not sufficiently acted upon and it may well be that the failure of the SGOIF to embrace more workers in other industries was a contributory factor in its downfall.

That those employed in other sectors, most notably in the sugar industry, were not successfully recruited was not through any lack of awareness or enthusiasm on the part of some organisers in the SGOIF. A new entity, it first had to expand its base from a union for brewery workers, employed by just two breweries, to one that incorporated all workers in manufacturing industry, be they cement, match or pasta factory workers. And besides, from 1920, it was hoped that the developing FOH, in which the SGOIF played no small part, would take the reins in organising a national union, a plan that did not bare fruit until 1925.

The SGOIF's initial aim was to welcome as many industrial workers as possible, whether Spanish, Cuban, black, white, male or female, and this partly dictated the ideological route that the union followed. Approximately half of all factory workers in Cuba were Spanish and many were probably new arrivals who, due to the low-skilled nature of the jobs, accepted such posts until they could get higher-paid or more secure employment. Those who had been in the country for less than five years could not be naturalised and so, according to the Cuban Constitution, were not eligible to vote. Likewise, the factories employed many women, most likely the first time that any women had been employed alongside men in urban areas of Cuba and,

as analysis of *El Progreso* has proven, many children were taken on as even cheaper labour in some establishments. Neither women nor workers under 21 years of age enjoyed suffrage. A mistrust of politics by those Cuban workers eligible to vote, exacerbated by the scale of corruption practised by politicians, and the disenfranchisement of others, made the use of the ballot box either unattractive or impossible. Another survival strategy often used by those living in hardship was emigration, but many of those in Cuba's factories, being Spanish, had already tried that avenue and found themselves in jobs that had seen a fall in the value of real wages (research has shown that an increase in pay was one of the continual demands of strikers belonging to the SGOIF). Promising immediate gains and eventual emancipation, anarcho-syndicalist unions offered a place where these workers, in particular, could voice their discontent.

The SGOIF grew considerably during its existence, attracting more workers as industry expanded. By securing a large and solid base, the union aimed to use a proletarian army to fight the might of a rapidly expanding industry: if the strength of industry lay in its size, so must that of the workers' union, it was reasoned. In this respect the SGOIF was successful and a detailed study of *El Progreso* has shown that it played a large part in helping to attract new members. Reporting on the success of strikes, the union hoped to illustrate the tangible benefits that non-members could gain from affiliation. Higher wages were within easy reach of all who joined union ranks, *El Progreso* seemed to guarantee, in articles that sat comfortably next to items that aimed to educate readers on the equality of women or the futility of government, for example.

Through analysis of *El Progreso*, it has become apparent that those writing for and editing the periodical were more concerned with what was happening in the present than with the promises of some distant future, although the preoccupation with the

on-going dispute at *La Polar* may have damaged the union rather than strengthened it. It is possible that too much emphasis was placed on the boycott of *La Polar* and on what SGOIF still envisaged to be a strike by ex-workers at the brewery. Almost four years after the initial strike was called for fairer wages for overtime worked, the union still maintained that that worker action was valid, even though new hands had been drafted in by the company (whom the SGOIF labelled strike-breakers) and, due to the transient nature of such employment, had probably been replaced over again. Although workers in many other unions supported the strike, especially those belonging to the FOH, it is possible that endless articles about the boycott in *El Progreso* became tiresome and, besides, there were other issues that needed to be addressed. From 1924, the periodical began to report on events in the sugar regions, at a time when sugar workers were beginning to take the initiative in declaring their own large strikes.

The importance of the sugar industry was largely underestimated by the SGOIF until that point and only Paulino Diez, the former Secretary-General of the CNT, who had recently arrived from Spain, appeared to have truly grasped the significance of unionising the thousands of sugar workers in Cuba. The economy relied heavily on the sugar crop and an all-out strike would have been detrimental both to the government and to US interests on the island. By the time of the strikes, the SGOIF had clocked up seven years experience of organising previously non-unionised workers and was in a good position to take the initiative in embracing those workers who manned the sugar factories in the *campo*. Diez's dream to incorporate sugar workers into the Ramo De Alimentación y sus Anexos de la Habana y su Radio, an organisation that aimed to encompass all those employed in the food and drink industry, would, in reality, have been an extension of the SGOIF, making it the most powerful union ever to have existed in Cuba. Maybe for this reason, Diez encountered fierce opposition from some prominent members of the FOH who, after

all, were planning an all-inclusive, nation-wide union drive (which later became the CNOC) and who, with limited success, attempted to take over the role of organising the striking workers at the mills. Later, the CNOC also failed to unionise workers in the *campo*, and not until 1933, eight years after the start of the end of anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba and the foundation of the PCC, did the Confederation, then headed by communists, successfully do so, and only then after the fall of the *Machadato*.

Although the SGOIF defended Diez as the FOH mounted personal attacks on him, it neglected to support fully his argument or to take the lead in immediately organising sugar workers, an act that could have placed the union even beyond the control of the authorities and trusts. Although it recognised the need for those in the campo to rise up, maybe the SGOIF believed too heavily in the spontaneity of the workers themselves and too little in the importance of a central organisational point. In the city, it had been far easier for workers to gain access to the ideas of the SGOIF and for the union to inform them of what was happening in other workplaces, either through direct inter-worker contact at work or home, or through *El Progreso*. The word would have spread less rapidly in an industry that covered the whole country, and it would have been more difficult for those in the mills to the far east of Cuba to receive news of the strikes occurring in Camagüey, for example. The failure of the SGOIF to take the organisational lead in 1924, therefore, must been seen as just one of the reasons for the collapse of the union and, consequently, of anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba.

The growth of the SGOIF was impressive but not impressive enough for its survival, although the unwillingness or inability to recruit more quickly is not, of course, the only explanation for the demise of the SGOIF. The purge on the union by the *Machadato*, while neither the sole destroyer of the union, certainly helped to damage

it beyond repair. Although the SGOIF had started out as a pragmatic union that that placed the onus on making life so difficult for employers that they would have to give in to their demands, the force of government persecution of the union and the refusal of management at *La Polar* to recognise the union or the strike, often forced it to defend rather than to attack.

The hitherto disregarded boycott of *La Polar* is a vital case study in helping to understand the SGOIF and the general mood of the labour movement in urban Cuba at that time, as it illustrates the extent of worker solidarity, the use of direct action (including, although not proven, murder) and union stubbornness when dealing with the employers, whom anarcho-syndicalists saw as one of the main enemies of the working class. The Pages of *El Progreso* display how much emphasis the SGOIF placed on propaganda during the conflict. Through the boycott, via the pages of the periodical, the union was able to educate readers on the importance of solidarity, on the use of direct action in preparation for the General Strike and eventual emancipation, on the vileness of employers and on the treachery of fellow workers who did not support the boycott (usually labelled strike-breakers or worse, *amarillistas*).

In a bid to win support and to make the SGOIF a tighter, more closed organisation, the union usually tried not to alienate strike-breakers, although it did vilify those who had been active anarcho-syndicalists but had abandoned the ideals of the SGOIF while remaining involved in the labour movement. The verbal abuse directed at Hilario Alonso and Felipe Zapata best illustrates the hostility reserved especially for "traitors" to the workers' cause. A study of the treatment of these men can be further used to demonstrate a lack of judgement on the part of writers in *El Progreso*. It was seen as important by them that the *amarillistas* be treated in an exemplary fashion: the union hoped that if others feared that they too might be ostracised by fellow

workers and peers, they would be dissuaded from abandoning the principles of the SGOIF. However, so much internal bickering was at the expense of more pressing matters. As was the case with the single-mindedness as regards the boycott of *La Polar*, it would have been more beneficial for the union to have concentrated on positive recruitment, as opposed to focussing on the negativity of abandonment; the likes of Alonso and Zapata defended their positions, after all, allowing others to read about and interpret possible flaws in union organisation. Both men maintained that the union was too restrictive and hierarchical. Zapata did not agree with the structure of the union and was more inclined towards orthodox anarchism, displayed by his part in the foundation of *Acción Consciente*, while Alonso had veered towards a more reformist attitude, supporting worker progression through social legislation. *El Progreso* did not publish their comments, although they could be easily sought out in other worker periodicals.

El Progreso was an important part of the success of the SGOIF. No other worker periodical in the 1920s (and none so radical) had published so many issues (some 250-300 issues in all) to so many readers (at one point around 5,000 copies per week were being sold) in such varying occupations all over the country. The periodical printed details of worker collections for strikers and their families and the financial in-goings and out-goings of the union were there for all to see, including the authorities. Such apparent openness did not satisfy the government and the SGOIF was condemned by the authorities as a sinister organisation whose members employed violence or committed murder at every opportunity.

Radical worker organisations in Cuba, as elsewhere, had always been repressed to some extent and the governments of Menocal (1913-1921) and Zayas (1921-1925) were no exception. The *Menocalista* regime had deported or imprisoned hundreds of workers and, needing to be seen by the USA as dealing with labour problems that

had disrupted the movement of sugar, repression was at its most fierce during 1919. The presidency of Zayas was less harsh, although he did keep the workers in check when strikes seemed to be getting out of employer-state control. As the records in the National Archive of Cuba have shown, the authorities jailed SGOIF members, often the same ones over and again, but usually had to free them due to a lack of substantial evidence against them. The fourteen-month imprisonment and subsequent release of Arias, Rivera and Quíros, accused of poisoning *La Polar*, is an excellent example of government capitulation in the face of a weak prosecution.

However, neither the rule of Zayas or Menocal can compare to the brutality of the *Machadato*. Although relatively tame by Latin American standards at that time, the repression unleashed by Machado on the workers and their unions was unprecedented in Cuba. Already known to the working class in his former capacity as Minister of the Interior, Machado pandered to US interests and, shortly after his inauguration, he promised to execute a "clean-up plan". This plan included the murder, deportation and imprisonment of undesirables in the Cuban labour movement and the SGOIF bore the brunt of it. It is probable that Machado was aware of the influence that the union enjoyed in the FOH and the emerging CNOC, evident from SGOIF members' impressive subscriptions to the former, in particular. Machado would also have been extremely concerned at the creation of the CNOC, which practically coincided with his rise to power. If Machado had wished to rid the important Federation and Confederation of anarcho-syndicalist influence, quashing the industrial workers' union was certainly an excellent place to begin. The persecution of individuals was coupled with the forced closure of both the SGOIF and *El Progreso*, extinguishing the union. The FOH was also silenced forever and, although the numerically reduced CNOC did not suffer the same fate in 1925, it was eventually crushed by Machado three years later, after members opposed Machado's unconstitutional re-election. Attempts by the much-esteemed Alfredo

López to reorganise the SGOIF resulted in his murder and the SGOIF did not reform until the fall of Machado in 1933, by which time communism had replaced anarcho-syndicalism as the possible saviour of workers in Cuba.

Communism was not a credible opponent of anarcho-syndicalism in 1925, although the rise of the former and the demise of the later did coincide. At its foundation, the PCC only claimed 27 members, hardly a force to be reckoned with, and it may well be for this reason that its members or the party did not appear on Machado's hit-list. Some founding members, such as Barriero and Vilaboa were also prominent members in the FOH, suggesting that Communist ideas were discussed among FOH members. However, although the Russian Revolution had been debated for years in Cuban worker press, neither anarcho-syndicalist dominated unions, such as the FOH or SGOIF, nor the authorities considered communism to be a threat in 1925. The SGOIF, as most anarcho-syndicalists in Cuba, envisaged reformism to be more of a danger to union leadership than communism, illustrated by the countless verbal attacks on those unionists veering if not towards reformism, then gradually away from anarcho-syndicalism. It is probable that the SGOIF underestimated the potential that communism had in taking hold in a country where only negligible splits had previously existed among leftist thinkers: a hitherto anarchist-dominated cohesiveness had led the majority of union players into a false sense of security.[170]

Events in Russia were not fully supported by the radical worker press, although *El Progreso*, believing as it did in freedom of speech (to a certain degree) did welcome points of view that were both pro- and anti-Bolshevik. Some condemned the brutality of the new government there: the whole premise of government, no matter what policies or actions it adheres to, is anathema to anarchism. Others insisted that at least the workers in Russia had played a part in overthrowing the previous system.

[170] Paulino Diez did, however, expect communist rivalry.

The point had been made in 1921 by one member of the pro-Bolshevik camp that someone like Lenin was needed in all regions in order that a solid form of organisation between workers be forged. It was exactly this lack of organisation that would hinder the success of the SGOIF.

Communists placed emphasis on organisation, while the SGOIF never wholeheartedly embraced the idea that a central focal point was tantamount to success. To do so would have been to deny its anarchist roots. The anarchist concentration on spontaneity did not rest well with the need for any worker union to forge some central point that could easily oversee the autonomous sections of that union. Centralisation necessitated a federal system, a leaning towards leadership, while anarchism aimed to respect the autonomy of separate branches of the larger union and of the individual. Anarchism and centralisation made limp bedfellows. The SGOIF, for its part, organised on a rotational basis, with a central committee that was re-elected each year and that invited delegates from every industrial sector. The organisational secretary and the financial secretary were paid a living wage so that these two men could concentrate their efforts solely on union duties, a luxury for any libertarian union.[171] Although organisation was an important aspect of union philosophy, failure to organise sugar workers has proven that not enough emphasis was placed upon it. While the anarchist Zapata had complained that the SGOIF was too hierarchical, the anarcho-syndicalist Diez maintained that, unlike the SGOIF, the FOH was too centralised, an observation that, considering the creeping influence of communism among some prominent members of the FOH, was probably more than a mere accusation. The SGOIF, then, was placed squarely in the anarcho-syndicalist camp, too centralised for the anarchists and not centralised enough for the emerging communists. In this respect, as with the SGOIF's failure to fully acknowledge the

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[171] Those elected to the committee were never female, despite the inclusion of women as union members.

importance of a growing nationalism in Cuba, the eventual overshadowing of anarcho-syndicalism by communism does admit a certain teleology: centralisation was essential and anarcho-syndicalism did not satisfy this necessity.

Although, through *El Progreso*, the SGOIF condemned the rise of US influence on the island, attacks were directed, in true anarcho-syndicalist style, towards companies as employers and statesmen as tyrants. However, all employers, regardless of nationality, and all states, were wholly criticized, as one of the main arguments of anarcho-syndicalism was that no hierarchy should exist in any part of life. Thus, the union attached no additional venom in attacking US employers over Spanish or Cuban ones: the tragedy lay not in the provenance of the bosses as much as in the fact that there were bosses at all, it maintained. However, many workers in Cuba (regardless of place of birth) had become increasingly disillusioned at the growing economic, and so political, power of the USA in Cuba. Ever since the introduction of the Platt Amendment, the Cuban authorities had quashed labour unrest for fear of intervention by the USA whose companies, after all, owned some of the largest sugar plantations in Cuba and who reserved the right to protect those interests by whatever means necessary. Cubans were aware that their needs were being compromised by those of capitalist (and, increasingly US) interests and the situation must have taken a more urgent turn with the advent of prohibition in the USA and the exploitation of Cuba as a "millionaires' playground".

Public anger at the huge US trusts and at their treatment of workers in Cuba was manifested in the setting up of the Anti-imperialist League and in the well-attended rallies they organised. Although *El Progreso* did help to publicise the League, it most probably supported the collapse of imperialism/capitalism as an international entity and not as a non-Cuban one. The SGOIF did not react sufficiently to the level of popular discontent vis-à-vis the American question. The communists did. Machado

did. The election of Machado was largely due to his promise to lessen the influence of the USA in Cuba and it was his rule that would ironically, and suddenly, stamp out the union and, with it, anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba.

The originality of this thesis is multi-fold. It has filled a large void in Cuban historiography, analysing the strength and importance of anarcho-syndicalism in 1920s Cuba. That class-consciousness was weak (or non-existent) prior to the formation of the PCC and the subsequent embracing of Marxism-Leninism is a false notion: the real rejection of a nationalist politics by anarchists appears to have been confused, by many labour historians, with an imagined political immaturity. In fact, the working class had fought for economic and social betterment throughout the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Neither have the anarcho-syndicalist educational crusades, both in and out of the workplace, been credited by most historians. Not only did many of the workers possess class-consciousness, but they fully aimed to share it with the less enlightened, and education was extended to the next generation - the children of the workers. What was absent, however, was the belief in a political answer to the problems of overwork, low wages and lack of control in the workplace. Instead, the radical elements of the Cuban working class strove for a wholly economic solution. That rejection of party politics has led some modern-day accounts to demote anarcho-syndicalism as unworthy of comment in a society now so convinced of the legitimacy of authoritarian rule. In the 1920s, communism quickly offered an alternative leftist ideal to the damaged-beyond-repair anarcho-syndicalism and it swiftly gained supporters, who may have felt that a centralised party could succeed where anarchism had failed.

My research has shown that anarchism was not fading in 1920, as has been indicated, rather, it was well supported and constantly attracting more adherents. For its part, the SGOIF was becoming a force to be reckoned with and the confidence

that workers placed with the growing union has been evidenced through analysis of *El Progreso.* The periodical, gathering dust in the Instituto de Historia for 80 years, consulted by no-one, was a long-running, informative union mouthpiece that was going from strength to strength, in terms of sales, until its forced closure in 1925. A study of *El Progreso* has shown the constant demands workers made of their bosses and their reinforced confidence as regards social and economic rights. It seems plausible that the confusion over the weakening of the ideology lies in the gradual overshadowing of a "purer" form of anarchism by anarcho-syndicalism during that time, a natural evolution in a country that was attracting bigger business and, so, a larger, more concentrated workforce: industrialisation necessitated industrial unionism.

This thesis has studied the reality and the importance of that industrial unionism in Cuba, which, until now, has been ignored. The SGOIF laid the foundations for the huge union drive of the sugar industry by communists in the 1930s, a fact that has been entirely overlooked. The SGOIF paved the way for the FOH and the CNOC, both of which are widely believed to have played a pivotal role in the working-class history of the country. A study of the SGOIF is tantamount, therefore, to understanding how these unions came about, and the influence that the SGOIF enjoyed in the Federation and Confederation it helped to create should not, as it has been, disregarded. Here, I have aimed to redress the balance, explaining how the SGOIF, through industrial unionism, appeared to offer a solution for previously unorganised factory workers: the nature of much of the workforce (disenfranchised foreigners, women and children and non-skilled workers who experienced job insecurity, giving them the air of the itinerant worker) demanded it.

The kind of leftist unionism embraced in Cuba's urban factories was similar to that practised in the USA's IWW, an organisation that drew together workers who, until

the foundation of "one big union", had been cast aside by the AFL, which concerned itself more with the aristocracy of skilled labour than the unskilled and/or migratory worker. Thus, the model the SGOIF used was borrowed more from the USA than Spain. Moreover, anarcho-syndicalists were not exclusively Spanish, a view that existed among the authorities and bourgeois press of the time and that has been perpetuated by contemporary historians. The former group hoped to discredit the wide-appeal of anarcho-syndicalism and to cause division among different factions of the labour force, namely foreign and native, while the latter have helped to veil the real popularity of the ideology among Cubans of the day, further legitimising present day communism/revolutionary socialism. Thus anarcho-syndicalism has been labelled an import, the only resort of desperate, Spanish troublemakers. While I do not maintain that Spanish workers were inconsequential in the union (on the contrary, the anarcho-syndicalist ideas brought to Cuba originated in Spain, while many factory workers in Havana, and so the union, belonged to the mass of disenfranchised and disillusioned Spaniards), I have illustrated that the SGOIF attracted all workers, regardless of provenance, gender or race. Some of the most respected anarcho-syndicalists were of Cuban stock, both within (Margarito Iglesias, Felipe Zapata) and without (Alfredo López, Antonio Penichet) the union.

Most importantly, though, this thesis has recognised the thousands of workers who made up the SGOIF, who, until now, had not reached the annals of Cuban historiography. Those who toiled in the breweries and in the paper, ice, drink, cement, pasta, chocolate, jam, match and biscuit factories merit their place in that history and their struggle deserves to be documented. Their collective voice has once again been heard.

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B: #4 – 25/12/1922

Año II – 1923

A: #5 – 10/01/1923
B: #6 – 25/01/1923

ACCIÓN LIBERTARIA:Periódico Quincenal Libertario, La Habana

Año I

#3 – 20/02/1924
#2 – 05/02/1924
#4 – 05/03/1924
#5 – 20/03/1924
#6 – 05/04/1924
#7 – 20/04/1924
#8 – 05/05/1924
#9 – 20/05/1924
#10 – 01/07/1924
#11 – 15/07/1924

ACCIÓN SOCIALISTA: Vocero Defensor de la Clase Obrera, La Habana:

Año IV:

A: #80 – 15/02/1926
B: #81 – 28/02/1926
C: #85 – 01/05/1926
D: #86 – 15/05/1926
E: #88 – 30/05/126
F: #89 – 10/06/1926

Año V:

A: #120 – 10/06/1927
B: #123 – 30/07/1927
C: #134 – 28/11/1927

Año VII:

A: #184 – 05/09/1929
B: #186 – 23/09/1929

Año VIII:
A: #201 – 11/03/1930

ALARMA, LA: Periódico Semenal, La Habana:

Año I:

#1 – 16/12/1893
#2 – 24/12/1893
#3 – 31/12/1893
#4 – 10/01/1894
#5 – 16/10/1894

ALERTA: Semenario Obrero Independiente, La Habana:

Año I:

#5 – 06/09/1899

ANDA: Órgano Oficial del Gremio de Pintores, Tapiceros y Doradores, La Habana:

Año I

#3 – 15/11/1921
#4 – 10/02/1921
#9 – 15/05/1921

ARCHIVO SOCIAL: Sociología y Literatura, La Habana:

Cuaderno 11 – 1894

Cuaderno 12 – 1894

Cuaderno 19 – 1894

AURORA: Organo Oficial de la Unión de Dependientes de Café, La Habana:

Año I – 1921

A: #1 – July

Año II – 1922

A: #11 – 01/05/1922

Año III – 1923

A: #24 – July 1923
B: #25 – August 1923
C: #26 – September 1923
D: #27 – October 1923
E: #28 – November 1923
F: #29 – December 1923

1924

A: #30 - January 1924
B: #31 – February 1924
C: #32 March 1924

D: #25 – June 1924
E: #36 – July 1924
F: #37 – August 1924
G: #39 – October 1924

1925

A: #43 – February 1925
B: #45 – April 1924
C: #48 – July 1925

BATALLA, LA: Periódico Anarquista de Propaganda Revolucionaria, La Habana:

Año I:

#2 – 13/04/1910.

Año II:

#1 – 19/03/1911

BOHEMIA, La Habana, 1972-1979.

CUBA CONTEMPORÁNEA, Revista Menual, La Habana, 1913:

CUBA SOCIALISTA, Havana, 1965/1966:

DEPENDIENTE, EL: Periódico Sindicalista. Organo defensor de los cocineros, dependientes de cafés, fondas, restaurantes, hotels y obreros de la isla de Cuba.

1911 (año I) – 1917, nos 1,3-5, 7, 11, 14-19, 21,22,24-26, 28-30, 34, 39, 40, 42, 44, 45, 47-50, 53-55, 57, 64-66, 69-78, 80-82, 89-99, 102, 104, 109-130, 133, 134, 136, 137, 140, 143, 160, 161, 163-178, 180, 181, 188, 190, 192-197, 199-201, 203, 204, 209, 211, 215, 225, 226, 228, 293-295, 297, 311.

FEDERACIÓN: Revista Mensual, La Habana:

Año XII – 2a Epoca:

#6 – Junio 1936
#7 – Julio 1936
#8 – Agosto 1936

FIAT LUX: Periódico de Ideas de Combate, La Habana;

Año I:

#4 – 30/05/1914

GERMINAL: Periódico Quincenal Libertario, La Habana:

Año I:

#1 – 01/05/1904
#2 – 15/05/1904

GRANMA, Havana, 1966-1975.

GUÁNGARA LIBERTARIA, Miami, 1987-1991.

HAVANA POST, THE, Havana:

01/01/1917
03/01/1917
14/01/1917
17/01/1917
19/01/1917
21/01/1917
25/01/1917

04/09/1918
05/09/1918
07/09/1918
10/09/1918
11/09/1918
17/09/1918
19/09/1918
21/09/1918
27/09/1918
01/10/1918
02/10/1918
06/10/1918
08/10/1918
10/10/1918
13/10/1918
17/10/1918
20/10/1918
31/10/1918
04/11/1918
05/11/1918
06/11/1918
07/11/1918
10/11/1918
14/11/1918
15/11/1918
23/11/1918

04/01/1921
10/01/1921
04/12/1921
06/12/1921
07/12/1921
09/12/1921
10/12/1921
11/12/1921
18/12/1921

INDUSTRIAL WORKER, THE, London:

1913

A: Vol 1, #1 – 01/11/1913
B: Vol 1, #2 - 15/12/1913

1914

A: Vol 1, #3, 15/01/1914
B: #4/5 – March/April 1914

JUSTICIA: Periódico Semenal. Dedicada a la Defensa de la Organizacion Obrera, La Habana:

Año II:

#68 – 24/12/1921

LUCHA, LA, La Habana:

02/09/1918
05/09/1918
06/09/1918
07/09/1918
12/11/1918
14/11/1918
15/11/1918
17/11/1918
18/11/1918
21/11/1918
23/11/1918
25/11/1918
29/11/1918

03/10/1924
06/10/1924
21/10/1924
22/10/1924

LIBERTARIO, EL: Periódico Anarquista, La Habana:

Año I:

#3 – 14/09/1905.

MEMORANDUM TIPOGRÁFICOS: ÓRGNO DE LA ASOCIACIÓN DE TIPÓGRAFOS EN GENERAL, La Habana:

Año I, Época II

#44 – 05/09/1914
#47 – 19/09/1914
#56 – 21/11/1914
#59 – 12/12/1924

Año IV, Época III

#146 – 10/12/1917

Año VII, Época IV

#138 – 25/03/1920
#184 – 10/04/1920

Año XIV – Época IV

#245 – 10/12/1926

NATURISTA, EL, La Habana:

Año I

#1 – 15/12/1912

NUESTRA PALABRA: Periódico Quincenal. Órgano del Sindicato General de Obreros de la Industria Fabril, La Habana.

Año I

#1 – 01/05/1934
#2 – 15/05/1934
#3 – 01/-6/1934
#4 – 15/06/1934
#7 – 15/08/1934
#8 – 01/09/1934
#9 – 15/09/1924
#10 – 01/10/1934
#13 – 15/11/1934

Año II

#17 – 15/02/1925
#18 – 01/03/1935

NUEVA AURORA: Semanario de Información de Doctrina y de Combate, La Habana:

#6 – 29/09/1919
#7 -07/10/1919
#10 – 07/11/1919
#11 – 24/11/1919
#13 – 23/12/1919

NUEVO IDEAL, EL, La Habana:

Año I:

#2 – 04/02/1899
#3 – 11/02/1899
#4 – 18/02/1899
#5 – 25/02/1899
#6 – 04/03/1899
#8 – 18/03/1899
#9 – 25/03/1899
#10 – 01/04-1899
#11 – 08/04/1899
#12 – 15/04/1899
#13 – 22/04/1899
#16 – 13/05/1899
#17 – 20/05/1899
#18 – 27/05/1899
#19 – 02/06/1899
#20 – 09/06/1899
#22 – 23/06/1899
#23 – 30/06/1899
#24 – 07/07/1899
#25 – 14/07/1899
#27 – 28/07/1899
#29 – 17/08/1899
#30 – 24/08/1899
#31 – 31/08/1899

#32 – 07/09/1899
#33 – 14/09/1899
#35 – 06/10/1899
#36 – 13/10/1899
#'38 – 27/10/1899
#39 – 02/11/1899
#40 – 09/11/1899
#41 – 16/11/1899
#45 – 14/12/1899
#46 – 21/12/1899

Año II:

#48 – 05/01/1900
#51 – 26/01/1900
#54 – 23/02/1900
#55 – 02/03/1900
#56 – 09/03/1900
#57 – 22/03/1900
#58 – 29/03/1900
#59 – 06/04/1900
#71 – 12/07/1900
#71 – 20/07/1900
#1 – 01/09/1900
#4 – 15/10/1900
#8 – 15/12/1900
#11 – 01/02/1901
#12 – 15/02/1901
#13 – 01/03/1901
#16 – 15/04/1901
#17 – 01/05/1901
#18 – 08/05/1901
#23 – 19/06/1901
#29 – 07/08/1901
#30 – 14/08/1901
#31 – 21/08/1901

PRODUCTOR, EL: Semenario Consegrado a la Defensa de los interesea Económicos-Sociales de la Clase Obrera, , La Habana:

Año II:

#2 – 12/07/1888
#4 – 26/07/1888
#22 – 29/11/1888
#44 – 07/03/1899
#46 – 14/03/1889
#54 – 11/04/1889
#58 – 25/04/1889
#60 – 02/05/1889
#61 – 05/05/1889
#69 – 09/06/1890
#70 – 06/06/1889
#73 – 16/06/1889
#75 – 23/06/1889

Año I:

#31 – 22/12/1889
#46 – 16/02/1890

#50 – 02/03/1890
#74 – 13/07/1890

PRODUCTOR, EL: Periódico Anarquista, Guanbánacoa

Año I, Epoca 1a:

#1 – 24/09/1891
#2 – 01/10/1891
#10 – 26/11/1891

Año I, Epoca II:

#6 – 11/02/1892
#16 – 21/04/1892
#30 - 11/08/1892
#32 – 25/08/1892

PRODUCTOR, EL: Periódico Anarquista, Regla

Año I:

#1 – 26/03/1893.

PROGRESO, EL: Órgano del Sindicato de la Industria Fabril, La Habana:

Año I - 1920

A: #1 - 03/09/1920
B: #4 – 24/09/1920
C: #5 – 01/10/1920
D: #7 – 22/10/1920
E: #13 – 03/12/1920

Año II – 1921

A: #19 – 21/01/1921
B: #23 – 18/02/1921
C: #27 – 18/03/1921
D: #37 – 27/05/1921
E: #39 – 09/06/1921
F: #41 – 23/06/1921
G: #42 – 30/06/1921
H: #43 - 07/07/1921
I: #44 – 14/07/1921
J: #45 – 21/07/1921
K: #46 – 28/07/1921
L: #48 – 11/08/1921
M: #49 – 18/08/1921
N: #50 – 28/08/1921
O: #52 – 08/09/1921
P: #1 – 15/09/1921
Q: #2 – 22/09/1921
R: #3 – 05/10/1921
S: #6 – 20/10/1921
T: #11 – 23/11/1921
U: #14 – 22/12/1921

Año III – 1922

A: #25 – 30/06/1922

Año IV – 1923

A: #10 – 31/05/1923
B: #11 – 15/06/1923
C: #14 – 31/07/1923
D: #15 – 15/08/1923
E: #16 – 31/08/1923
F: #17 – 13/09/1923
G: #18 – 20/09/1923
H: #19 – 27/09/1923
I: #20 – 14/10/1923
J: #21 – 11/10/1923
K: #22 – 18/10/1923
L: #23 – 25/10/1923
M: #24 – 01/11/1923
N: #25 – 08/11/1923
O: #26 – 15/11/1923
P: #27 – 22/11/1823
Q: #28 – 29/11/1923
R: #29 – 06/12/1923
S: #30 – 18/12/1923

Año V – 1924

A: #1 – 03/01/1924
B: #2 – 10/01/1924
C: #3 – 17/01/1924
D: #5 – 31/01/1924
E: #6 – 07/02/1924
F: #7 – 14/02/1924
G: #8 – 21/02/1924
H: #9 – 28/02/1924
I: #10 – 06/03/1924
J: #11 – 13/03/1924
K: #12 – 20/03/1924
L: #13 – 27/03/1924
M: #14 – 03/04/1924
N: #15 – 10/04/1924
O: #16 – 17/04/1924
P: #17 – 01/05/1924
Q: #18 – 08/05/1924
R: #19 – 15/05/1924
S: #20 – 22/05/1924
T: #21 – 29/05/1924
U: #22 – 05/06/1924
V: #23 – 12/06/1024
W: #24 – 21/06/1924
X: #25 – 28/06/1924
Y: #26 – 05/07/1924
Z: #27 – 12/07/1924
A1: #28 – 19/07/1924
B1: #29 – 26/07/1924
C1: #31 – 09/09/1924
D1: #32 – 16/08/1924
E1: #33 – 23/08/1924
F1: #34 – 30/08/1924
G1: #35 – 06/09/1924

H1: #36 – 13/09/1924
I1: #37 – 20/09/1924
J1: #38 – 27/09/1924
K1: #39 – 04/10/1924
L1: #40 – 11/10/1924
M1: #41 – 18/10/1924
N1: #42 – 25/10/1924
O1: #43 – 01/11/1924
P1: #44 – 08/11/1924
Q1: #45 – 15/11/1924
R1: #46 – 22/11/1924
S1: #47 – 29/11/1924
T1: #48 – 06/12/1924
U1: #49 – 13/12/1924
V1: #50 – 20/12/1924
W1: #51 – 27/12/1924

Año VI – 1925

A: #1 – 03/01/1925
B: #2 – 10/01/1925
C: #3 – 17/01/1925
D: #4 – 24/01/1925
E: #9 – 28/02/1925
F: #11 – 14/03/1925
G: #12 – 25/03/1925
H: #13 – 28/03/1925
I #14 – 04/04/1925
J: #17 – 25/04/1925
K: #19 – 09/05/1925
L: #21 – 23/05/1925
M: #22 – 30/05/1925
N: #29 – 16/06/1925
O: #32 – 06/08/1925
P: #33 – 13/08/1925
Q: #34 - 20/08/1925
R: #35 – 27/08/1925
S: #36 – 10/09/1925
T: #38 – 24/09/1925

PRO-VIDA, La Habana:

Año II:

#4 – Enero, 1915
#5 – Febrero, 1915
#6 – Marzo, 1915
#8 – Mayo, 1915
#9 – Junio, 1915
#10 y #11, Julio y agosto, 1915

Año III:
#17 – Febereo, 1916
#18 – Marzo, 1916
#20 – Mayo, 1916
#24 – Setiembre, 1916
#26 – Noviembre, 1916

Año IV:

#33, 01/05/1917
#34 – 01/06/1917
#35 – 06/06/1917
#38 – 16/07/1917
#40 - Setiembre, 1917

REBELIÓN: Semenario Anarquista:

Año I, Regla:

#1 – 14/10/1908
#2 – 31/10/1908
#3 – 18/11/1908

Año II:

#8 – 21/01/1909
#10 – 11/02/1909
#12 – 04/03/1909
#13 – 18/03/1909
#14 – 31/03/1909
#15 – 08/04/1909
#19 – 30/05/1909
#20 – 12/06/1909
#23 – 16/07/1909
#28 – 24/10/1909

Cruces, Año II

#2 – 16/04/1910
#3 – 01/05/1910

SANTIAGO, Santiago de Cuba, 1979:

SOLIDARIDAD GASTRONÓMICA, La Habana:

Año V - #6 - 15/06/1954
Año VI - #8 – 15/08/1955
Año VII - #12 – 15/12/1956

TEORÍA Y PRÁCTICA, La Habana, 1967.

¡*TIERRA*!; *Periódico Semenal:*

Año II:

#44 – 09/05/1903
#45 – 16/05/1903
#51 – 27/06/1903
#52 – 04/07/1903
#56 – 01/08/1903
#58 – 15/08/1903
#59 – 22/08/1903
#60 – 29/08/1903
#61 – 05/09/1903
#63 – 19/09/1903
#64 – 26/09/1903
#66 – 10/10/1903

#70 – 07/11/1903

Año VI:

#222 – 23/03/1907
#226 – 30/04/1907
#235 – 27/07/1907
#251 – 21/12/1907

Año VII:

#254 – 18/01/1908
#257 – 22/02/1908
#260 – 28/03/1908
#262 – 12/04/1908
#269 – 13/06/1908
#274 – 15/08/1908
#289 – 16/-1/1909

Año VI:

#222 – 23/03/1907
#226 – 30/04/1907
#235 – 27/07/1907
#251 – 21/12/1907
#294 – 27/02/1909
#298 – 27/03/1909
#318 – 16/10/1909

Año IX:

#330 – 15/01/1910
#343 – 16/04/1910

Año X:

A: #408 – 01/07/1911
B: #410 – 19/08/1911
C: #411 – 26/08/1911
D: #418 – 13/10/1911
E: #423 – 11/11/1911
F: #428 – 23/12/1911

Año XIII:

#562 – 16/07/1914
#565 – 06/08/1914
#568 – 27/08/1914
#569 – 03/09/1914
#570 – 10/09/1914
#573 – 01/10/1914
#575 – 22/10/1914
#578 – 26/11/1914
#579 – 03/12/1914

Año I:

#1 – 14/08/1924
#2 – 21/08/1924
#3 – 28/08/1924

#4 – 04/09/1924
#6 – 18/09/1924
#7 – 25/09/1924
#8 – 02/10/1924
#9 – 09/10/1924
#10 – 16/10/1924
#11 – 23/10/1924
#12 – 30/10/1924
#13 – 06/11/1924
#14 – 13/11/1924
#15 – 20/11/1924
#18 – 11/12/1924
#19 – 18/12/1924
#20 – 25/12/1924

Año II:

#21 – 06/01/1925
#25 – 30/01/1925
#35 – 16/04/1925
#42 – 05/06/1925

¡*TIERRA!: Organo de la Federación Central de Anarquistas de Cuba*, La Habana:

Año I:

#6 – 30/01/1934
#7 – 10/03/1934
#8 – 10/04/1934

TRABAJADORES, Órgano Official de la Central de Trabajadores de Cuba, La Habana.

VERDE OLIVIO, La Habana, 1972, 1992.

VÍA LIBRE: Periódico Semanal, La Habana:

Año I:

#1 – 11/07/1911
#2 – 15/07/1911
#3 – 05/08/1911

Año II:

#7 – 09/03/1912

VOZ DEL DEPENDIENTE, LA: Organo defensor de los dependientes de café, fondas, restaurantes, hotels y cocineros de la isla de Cuba

1907 (año I) – 1911, nos 1, 26-28, 33, 44, 53, 55, 65-82, 84, 85, 87-103, 105-107, 109, 110, 112-114, 117-127, 129-131, 134, 135, 137-140, 142, 143, 145-153, 175, 177-179, 182, 183.

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FAC - Federación Anticlerical Cubana – Legajo 371, Expediente 11251

FOH - Federación Obrera de la Habana – Legajo 383, Expediente 11540

"La Gloria" – Unión de Empleados y Obreros de la Fábrica de Chocolate, Galleticas y Confitura "La Gloria" – Legajo 341, Expediente 10153

UCH – Unión de Cocineros de la Habana – Legajo 433, Expediente 15393

SDRHFH – Sociedad de Dependientes de Restauantes, Hoteles y Fondas de la Haban – Legajo 425, Expediente 13421

CMA – Congregación Mariana de la Anunciata – Legajo 346, Expediente 16019

SOIC - Sindicato Obrero Industrial de Cuba – Legajo 371, Expediente 11256

SENFH – Sociedad de Empleados de la Nueva Fábrica de Hielo – Legajo 1118, Expediente 23376

Secretaria de la Presidencia

#63, Legajo 76

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Dirección General del Censo, *Movimiento de Población en la República desde Primer de Enero de 1924 a 31 DiciembAre del mismo año*, La Habana, 1925.

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